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YESTERDAY, TO-DAY, AND FOR EVER

THE BIBLE STORY

BY

WILLIAM CANTON

With Illustrations in Colour, and Map

YESTERDAY, TO-DAY AND FOR EVER

BY

WILLIAM CANTON

1845-

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FOREWORD

About two years ago a devoted friend of the British and Foreign Bible Society suggested that if a volume could be written embodying some of the incidents illustrating the power of the Bible which are recorded in the Society's Annals, it might encourage the wider and more serious reading of the Word of God among those who are neglecting it, to their own loss, and to the loss of the nation and the race. In consultation together we decided to ask Mr. William Canton, the Society's historian, to undertake the task of authorship. He consented, and at once began his work, but its progress was delayed by frequent illness. He had finished Chapter xxv., and on the night before he died was making notes for the closing words. Apparently he intended to use a little leaflet issued by the Society and entitled 'The Book for To-day.' We have printed this leaflet as an addendum, but otherwise send out the volume as it left Mr. Canton's pen.

It is the swan-song of a poet and saint, who

through fourscore years won the admiration and love not only of those in the inner circle of his friendship, but of the world-wide circle of readers who found inspiration and strength in what he wrote.

JOHN H. RITSON.

THE BIBLE HOUSE,
LONDON,
Sept. 1926.

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CHAPTER I

THE EASTER BELLS

Easter Sunday! The bright air is alive with the resonance of bells. The fresh breeze, which breaks away in all directions at the street corners, seems to bring in the joyous sound from a dozen churches far and near. One knows that, league after league, this Easter music is ringing out from town and village, and is drifting ever westward over farms and fields, hillsides, woodlands, and russet moors; and as one hears it in fancy, one wonders how many there are who realise that this Carillon of the Resurrection did not begin here, that it began, twelve hours ago, where each new day begins—in the Fiji Islands.

Over eighteen centuries had gone by when the glad tidings of 'Christ Risen' reached those islands. As late as 1854 the great war-drum, 'Crier of War,' summoned the dusky savages of Mbau to a cannibal feast. Ten days later, and again the Crier of War was heard, but it was now calling the people to

witness the king with his queens and their children, and with many of his warriors, pledging their allegiance to the true God.

A month or two afterwards, the Bible Society's first edition of the Fiji New Testament was landed on the neighbouring island of Viwa. Though the labours of the missionaries had been singularly blessed, yet in 1863 an island chief slew five Christians for another feast of blood ; but everywhere else grass was growing over the cannibal ovens. Two years more, and the first consignment of the Fiji Bible was received with wild delight. A troop of native school-children, singing jubilantly, accompanied the missionary as he took a copy for the king to see ; and 'Now, Lord,' said an aged native, kissing the book with tears of joy as he lay on his death-bed, 'Now, Lord, lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.' Yet another nineteen years, and the 'murder-stone' on which the victims of the cannibals had been ruthlessly killed was made into a baptismal font.

So from its many hundred churches the bells of Fiji rang in this Easter Day to the world. Within an hour their music was chiming across New Zealand in the south, the Ellice and Gilbert Islands in the north, New

Caledonia, the Loyalties in the west, and the New Hebrides, for ever associated with the names of the martyrs, John Williams and the Gordons. In another hour it was Easter in the Solomon Islands and New Britain ; and the bells of Rockhampton and Sydney responded to the bells of Brisbane. In yet another hour the prayer and praise of the churches of Tasmania, Victoria, and New South Wales mingled with those of the Papuan churches and the Christians of Japan.

Westward and still westward travelled the joyous carillon, north and south of the equator —over Korea and Manchuria, Formosa, the Philippines, the Eastern Archipelago. Could one but picture these lands and island clusters of palm and spice, could one but see the nations and tribes in the vivid colours of life, and perceive as in ' a crystal ' the whole story of their Christianity, this pageant of the Resurrection would surely be the most marvellous in human history.

While the bells are ringing here throughout these islands of ours, the Christian negroes of the Gold Coast and Liberia are going to church at the same moment as our own people. It is but a limited vision which takes in merely a span of the meridian. In the twelve hours

since this Easter sun rose over Fiji there has been never an hour in which its light may not be said to have shone on the Word of God—if not the whole Bible or New Testament, at least some complete portion of the Sacred Scriptures—in one or more of five hundred and seventeen native languages.

As the sun passes westward into the New World there will not be an hour in which it may not light a page of the Scriptures in fifty-four native tongues[1]—to take no account of the versions in the Old World languages which immigrants in their tens of thousands have carried with them to their new homes.

Far away in the South Seas the last of the islands on which the bells of Easter morning will ring are Niué and Tonga—Niué, once 'Savage Island,' as Captain Cook named it when he sailed away from the wild hordes which prevented his landing; to-day 'a little child' of the Empire, who 'stood up to help the kingdom of George the Fifth' in the Great War, with money and some hundred and fifty of its finest young men, ready to die

[1] Of the translations in the 517 languages of the Eastern hemisphere the Bible Society has published all but 33; and of those in the 54 languages of the Western hemisphere all but 6. The versions it has not published, it has aided by purchase for sale in its depots or by its colporteurs.

for England and that life of the soul which England revealed to them : Tonga, the first Christian king of which was a veritable missionary in the evangelising of Fiji, and died in 1893 a hundred years old. As the morning sun of Easter Sunday passes radiantly over these islands, Easter Monday will have already dawned on Fiji, eight degrees away.

One thinks of the innumerable people of every race and colour between the icy shores of the Northern Lights and the isles under the Southern Cross — of 'the young men and maidens, old men and children' — worshipping the Risen Saviour ; and a new Hundred and Forty-eighth Psalm seems ringing round the world in that Easter music.

CHAPTER II

THE JOY OF THE RESURRECTION

THE wonder and the beauty of all this Easter gladness are multiplied a hundredfold when we turn once more to the closing pages of the Gospels, and are carried back in the spirit through the centuries.

It is springtime in the land, and from all parts of Palestine, and from far beyond its limits, troops of Jewish pilgrims are coming up to the Holy City for the Passover. Their voices reach us from *wadi* and hillside as they sing the Songs of Ascent in glad remembrance of the deliverance of their fathers from the bondage of Pharaoh and the captivity in Babylon; and their praise to the God of Israel kindles fresh hope in their hearts of yet another deliverance—freedom from the sway of Rome under which the people are chafing.

They have long waited for the consolation of Israel, and now in these days there are strange rumours of a prophet who may indeed be the expected Messiah. Among those who

have arrived in the city many are seeking for Him, many are asking if He is coming to the feast. Yes, He is coming. The throng of wayfarers who saw Him give sight to the blind at Jericho and followed Him, praising God, have brought word of His approach. He rests at Bethany, and Lazarus, raised from the dead, sits with Him at table. Mary anoints His feet with precious spikenard, and when Judas complains of the waste, He says, ' Suffer her to keep it against the day of My burying ' ; but no one understands His words. On the morrow a crowd of the people who have come to the feast hasten to meet Him. They strew green branches and garments on His way, and with cries of joy they hail Him ' King of Israel.' The very children welcome Him in the Temple with their ' Hosannas ! ' For one day of jubilation the New Kingdom seems to be at hand.

Suddenly the appalling tragedy of the Son of God nailed to the cross is accomplished. As twilight falls on Jerusalem, the streets of the city and the tents outside the walls are glittering with lights. The great feast has begun. The cup of thanksgiving is drunk, the bitter herbs and the ' bread of misery ' are eaten ; once more the story of the bondage and the deliverance is told. And the full moon of the Pass-

over shines down on the new tomb in the garden.

Who can conceive the utter desolation of His disciples—broken in spirit, derelict in hope, their hearts darkened by His awful death? What was left to them but to return to their homes and take up their daily toil, if indeed they could escape from the rage of the Pharisees? This was the end of all. Him they could never forget—so lovable, so compassionate, so kingly, so gifted with more than mortal powers; but never again could they look for the restoration of Israel. Their one thought had been the coming of 'the Kingdom.' They had trusted it was He who would have redeemed Israel. To the end they had contended who should sit on His right hand and who on His left. And now He in whom they had trusted was dead. Again and again He had foretold them what was to happen, but they had never understood Him.

Then, without their having even a thought of what He had said would also happen, there broke upon their despair the divine vision, the unearthly fear, the unutterable joy of His Resurrection. Their hearts were uplifted with love and gladness, but in the very rapture of what they saw it was still incredible that they

were looking on Him ' who had been alive and was dead and is living for evermore.'

For the space of forty days He appeared among them and conversed with them. He appeared to them singly ; He was seen by numbers at once ; they had so many ' infallible proofs,' it was impossible to doubt that He was the Word of Life whom they had heard, had seen with their eyes, and had touched with their hands. And yet even now, so little did they understand why He had chosen them for His disciples that in the last hour of this blessed communion with them they asked the question : ' Dost Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel ? '

It was not until the day of the rushing wind and the tongues of fire that the Holy Spirit revealed to them the true Kingdom of God, and brought to their remembrance all that Jesus had said. Then, burning in their speech, inspired with the certainty of life everlasting, they stood forth new men and fearless, and preached Christ crucified, Christ risen, Christ alive and undying, Christ ever in companionship with them—unseen indeed, but not beyond the possibility of vision—' unto the end of the world.'

Believers in thousands were added to their

number; and the eyes of these were opened to see Christ in the hungry and to feed Him, to see Him in the naked and to clothe Him, to see Him in the stranger and to take Him in, in the sick and in the prisoner and to visit Him. So the mission 'unto all nations' began.

Joy in Christ Risen and in life everlasting was the dominant inspiration in the teaching of the Apostles, in their own lives and in their deaths—joy and life for the poor and lowly, for the aged, for the toiler and the bondslave, for the blind, the lame, the leper, the possessed, for the Gentile no less than for the Jew. Who can realise to-day what such 'glad tidings' meant for the masses of mankind amidst the luxury and licentiousness, the heartless cruelty, the tyranny, and the foul idolatries of heathendom?

Is it strange that the assurance of immortal life beyond a world full of unintelligible sufferings and wrongs kindled in men's hearts a passionate eagerness to 'depart and be with Christ'? St. Paul felt it: 'To die is gain.' For St. Paul life had its duties, so that to abide in the flesh was more needful, but in the ruthless years of persecution, when the sole escape from a death of torture was denial of the Lord

Jesus, the martyrs went to death rejoicing in that revelation.

'Come fire and cross and grapplings with wild beasts,' wrote Ignatius, the aged bishop of Antioch, a disciple of St. John the Beloved, on his way in chains to Rome; 'only let me find Christ Jesus.' Some fifty years later, 'Boys and young women,' wrote Minucius Felix, 'set at naught crosses and tortures, wild beasts and all the terrors of punishment, with an inspired patience of suffering.'

Among the most ancient traces left of human life on earth the latest research has discovered evidence of 'a faith in things unseen' and a conviction of 'human existence untrammelled by the flesh.' Through all the ages the heart and the mind of man must have compelled him to seek for God in the mysteries which encompassed him. Of all the ancient thinkers known to us, Socrates, with his belief in spiritual premonitions and in the supreme intelligence ordering the universe, probably came nearest to the divine truth; but there was no unquestionable proof of immortality. St. Paul would have found among the graves of Athens no inscriptions more hopeful than these:

'If below the earth there be rewards for

the good, I know that for thee, Nurse, more than for any, is honour waiting in the abode of Persephone and Pluto.'

'The bones and flesh of our sweet son lie in earth, but his soul is gone to the chamber of the holy.'

Not until the Lord Jesus had risen may be found among the dead such peace of heart, such confidence in life to come, as survive in such inscriptions as these in the Catacombs of Rome. This is the epitaph of a beloved daughter of fourteen years: 'For whom thanks be to the Lord and to Christ.' This is the prayer for another daughter: 'Lord Jesus, remember our child.' And this is yet another petition: 'May our mother rest well, I pray Thee, O Light of the Dead.'

And the Joy of the Resurrection invested the Cross with glory.

CHAPTER III

THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

Death on the cross was a horror and an unspeakable shame in the Roman world. 'Far be the very name of the cross,' cried Cicero, 'not only from the body of a Roman, but from his eyes, from his hearing, from his very thoughts.'

To the Christian it was the symbol of his redemption. The agony and ignominy had been miraculously changed into triumph, and the cry of St. Paul, 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' gave words to the immense gladness which sprang from the certainty that dust and darkness were not the close of all, but that 'this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.'

The very name of the cross, the *stauros*, the stake, was changed. Already in the Acts, in Galatians, in the First Epistle of St. Peter, the word 'tree' had begun to displace the 'cross' of the Gospels. The age of relics had not yet

dawned, and in that great joy of the first Christians the actual instrument of death was forgotten, and all trace of it was lost. Early in the third century there sprang up a legend that 'the blessed Tree,' which earth could not keep, had been taken up into the heavens, in which it would appear on the last day as 'the sign of the Son of man' (St. Matt. xxiv. 30).

In his letter to the Trallians, St. Ignatius on his way to martyrdom speaks of true Christians as 'branches of the Cross,' and 'their fruit as imperishable.'

In the Roman Catacombs where when the lamps lit up the frescoes on wall and ceiling and the inscriptions on the places of the departed, the Rome of the lions and the 'living torches' was forgotten by the Christians in the peace of God, and all references to our Lord were made through emblems or idyllic imagery. Veneration forbade any attempt to picture Him in His humanity. He was the Good Shepherd in the beauty of unchanging youth—now standing near the fold with the lost sheep on His shoulders: now piping such sweet music that His flock cease grazing that they may listen; now sitting wearied, with His dog anxiously watching Him. The form of the Cross itself was derived by slow changes

from a monogram—the Greek letters X and P (our CH and R) representing the word ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ or Christ. These were superimposed, ☧, and afterwards were modified to ☩, the earliest dated use of which takes us back to A.D. 407. In later years this monogram was often inlaid with gems and garlanded with flowers. The removal of the P leaves us the simple †.

In the splendid basilica which, about the close of the fourth century, St. Paulinus of Nola built in memory of St. Felix, he had a picture in mosaic in 'the most lively and glorious colours'—the Cross, all purple, wreathed with palms and flowers under a shining sky, and on the arms of the Cross a flock of white doves.

A generation later, in the *Lustra Sex*, attributed to Claudianus Mamertius,[1] occur the lines :

> 'O faithful Cross, among all trees
> The one tree peerless !
> No greenwood shows the like of thee,
> In leafage, blossom, fruit !'

[1] Brother of Mamertius, Bishop of Vienne, founder of the Rogation Days, in A.D. 450, when the city was shaken by earthquake, ravaged by plague, and threatened by invaders.

A century later still, Venantius Fortunatus sings in his *Vexilla Regis* :

> 'O Tree of beauty, Tree of light!
> O Tree with royal purple dight!
> On whose dear arms, so widely flung,
> The weight of this world's ransom hung.'

The transition from the Tree of Glory to the Crucifix was very gradual. The earliest known representation of the Death on Calvary, a miniature in a copy of the Syrian Gospels, dates from A.D. 586.[1] Though the art of it is rude, the glory of the Cross still prevails. The figure of the Redeemer is clothed in purple, and crowned with a halo. In A.D. 692 the Church, in conflict with heresy, decreed that, instead of the symbol of the Lamb, our Lord in His humanity should be associated with the Cross; but more than one papal injunction was needed to enforce the change.

At the end of the seventh century the figure of our Lord was entirely clothed. In the ninth it was raised to the centre of the Cross, but it bore no expression of suffering—the eyes were open, the unpierced hands were extended in prayer. 'It was not until the eleventh century that Art attempted to repre-

[1] Preserved in the Laurentian Library, Florence.

sent either the agony or the death of the Son of God.' [1]

This departure from the traditional reserve of the Early Christians may have been due to the troubles of a period in which the souls of men were deeply stirred by the eerie belief that the end of the world was at hand, by the emotion which impelled crowds of men and women of all ranks and classes to offer their prayers in the land where the Saviour had suffered and risen again, and by the massacres and outrages with which the Seljuk Turks threatened to plant the Crescent above the Cross.

The time was not remote when, like St. Francis of Assisi and St. Elizabeth of Hungary, good men and women would be urged to keep the vision of Calvary in their hearts and to show the joy of the Resurrection in their lives, but this artistic realism has continued to our own day.

[1] Withrow: *The Catacombs of Rome*, p. 270.

CHAPTER IV

THE POWER OF THE BOOK

'EVERY man heard them speaking in his own language.' That utterance with which the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostles at Pentecost proved to be no less than a divine direction for all time. They were indeed to preach in Christ's name to all nations, but the word spoken was to become the written word, so that every man might learn the good tidings in his mother-tongue.

Not later than A.D. 150 the Syriac version of the Scriptures began to spread the faith through Mesopotamia and beyond the Tigris. Versions in Greek and Latin[1] spread it in the West and along the northern shores of Africa. The Coptic (Egyptian),[2] Gothic, and

[1] Eventually the Vulgate of St. Jerome, 382-405.

[2] There is still in existence a copy of the Coptic Gospels, written about A.D. 350, which may have been used by the great abbot Macarius: and the Codex Argenteus (preserved in Upsala), written in letters of silver and sometimes of gold in the fifth or early sixth century, contains fragments of the Gothic Gospels of Ulfilas.

Ethiopic Scriptures in the fourth century, the Armenian in the fifth, and the Slavonic in the ninth were drawing souls to Christ.

From the words of St. John Chrysostom one gathers that numerous other translations were made among 'barbaric people,' but, from far in the East to the Atlantic sea-ways of the Phoenician traders, the Syriac and Latin versions alone must have reached many races between the tenth and the fifty-fifth degrees of latitude north of the equator. In the sixth century the Syriac had got to Ceylon, in the seventh to China.

Whatever 'false Christs and false prophets' arose, whatever schisms and heresies divided believers, the Sacred Scriptures preserved, more lasting than brass, the ancient promise of redemption, the previsions of its approach, the earthly life and the teaching of the Saviour of the world.

For more than one of these old languages an alphabet had to be made, so that every man should be able to read in his own tongue. One recalls the Cross of the Catacombs which is pictured with the first and the last letter of the Greek alphabet on either side—'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.' Those old versions might have borne,

and to-day, among the hundreds of translations issued by the Bible Society, there are many which might well bear, that hieroglyph —Christ, the beginning and the end of Scripture.

There is an old Hebrew lexicon entitled 'The Tents of Judah.' He was a wise man who so named it, for the language of a people is the dwelling-place of its spirit. Every language into which the Word of God is translated is transfigured into a new dwelling for the soul by the light of faith and by the vision of God and of the life to come.

It is easy to understand the eagerness, the hope, the joy with which the Gospel was welcomed by the poor, the oppressed, the sorrowful, the despairing in every land; but men of wealth and position, the thinkers, the revellers—how did Christianity appeal to them? Happily some details of conversion in those early years have come down to our own day.

About the year 103, Justin the Apologist was born of wealthy parents in Vespasian's New Town, near the ruins of Shechem in Samaria. Eager to penetrate the mysteries of the visible world and the human soul, he tried one philo-

sophic teacher after another, but he found no satisfaction until he came to a Platonic philosopher. While he delighted in the doctrines of Plato, he tells us, he heard the Christians defamed; but when he saw them fearless of death and torture, he refused to believe that they were living in wicked self-indulgence. Then on a day, 'as I was walking in reverie along the seashore I met an aged man of such gracious and grave appearance that I paused to look at him; and we fell into conversation. He reproached me for preferring speculation to action, and told me that the knowledge I sought was meant for daily use. When I asked him how I should attain to this knowledge: "Long before you philosophers existed," he replied, "there were righteous men, beloved of God and enlightened by Him. Their books are still with us, and they reveal the beginning and the end of all creatures. They prescribe belief in one God, the Father and Creator of all things, and in Jesus Christ His Son whom He sent into the world. Plead earnestly with the Supreme Being that the gates of light and the way of truth may be opened to you."'

Justin never saw the old man again, but an intense ardour was kindled in Justin's heart. He turned to the Sacred Writings, devoted

himself to the defence of Christianity, and finally won the martyr's crown at Rome about A.D. 167.

Tatian the Syrian was one of Justin's pupils in Rome. He tested every form of the religious worship of his time, and as he reflected on the failure of his search, 'I came,' he says, 'on certain barbaric writings, more ancient than the doctrines of the Greeks, and too divine to be marred by their errors. . . . My soul being thus taught by God, I understood how the writings of the Gentiles lead to condemnation, but the Sacred Scriptures to freedom from the slavery of the world and from thousands of tyrants.' His *Diatessaron*, or *Four-Gospel Story*—the first consecutive narrative of our Lord's life on earth—circulated for centuries in various languages.

'There was a time,' wrote Theophilus (Bishop of Antioch, 168-181) to one Autolycus, a learned pagan, '*a time when I believed no more than you do.* I read the Scriptures and believed. I read the writings of the Prophets, and what they foretold has come to pass. You have asked me to make my God known to you. Behold Him! It is He whom I exhort you to believe and to serve.'

Nearly two hundred years later, in Milan,

St. Augustine passed through the supreme crisis of his life. After a vain search for God among the Manichæans and Neo-Platonists he had seriously begun to study the Scriptures, when, on a day, an African officer of the Imperial Court called on him and his friend Alypius. Seeing a copy of St. Paul's Epistles on the table, the visitor looked up in glad surprise, for he was himself a Christian. He told Augustine of St. Antony of the Egyptian desert, and related how, some time before, two of his friends wandering in the gardens outside the walls of Treves came upon a cottage in which they found a little book containing a 'Life' of St. Antony. The reading of it led them to forsake everything and to give themselves up to a religious life.

The story touched Augustine to the heart. It seemed, he writes, as though God had 'turned him round in front of himself,' so that he saw himself laid bare; and his conscience filled him with shame and misery. When the officer left them, Augustine in his emotion went out into the garden, followed by Alypius, and they sat down as far as might be from the house. Then as Augustine struggled within himself, and the allurements of the world clung to him almost like living things and

pleaded, 'Dost thou cast us off? Shall this or that never again be permissible for thee?' there arose such a storm of feeling that he got up from his seat, and with a few words choked by tears he left Alypius.

Under cover of a fig-tree he cast himself down and wept and prayed in passionate contrition. While he prayed to be released—not to-morrow, nor yet again to-morrow, but in that very hour—from the sins of the past, he heard a voice, as of a boy or girl, singing over and over: 'Take it up and read it! Take it up and read it!' The words sounded like the catch of some children's game, but he had never heard them before. Then at a sudden thought that they were a call from God, he arose and returned to where Alypius was sitting, caught up the book of St. Paul, which he had left with him, and hastily opened it.

His eyes fell on the closing words of the thirteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans:

'Not in revelling and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and jealousy. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.'

He read no further ; nor had he need, for in 'the serene light which was shed into his heart,' as he tells us, 'all the darkness of doubt vanished away.' On Easter Eve, A.D. 387, in his thirty-third year, Augustine, with his son Adeodatus and his friend Alypius, was baptized, to the great joy of his mother Monnica, by St. Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan.

All these things happened long ago. Have they ceased to happen in this vaster world in which so much has been changed since then? Turn to the records of the Bible Society, and almost leaf after leaf it will be seen that the spiritual experiences of the early Christian centuries are the spiritual experiences of our own time. The work of the Apostles still goes on—'in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness' ; still goes on the work of enabling every man to hear the voice of God in his own language ; and even the testimony of the martyrs has not ceased. The sweet, startling voice which changes the lives of men, like the singing of *Pippa* as she passes in Browning's fine dramatic poem, has been heard by myriads since Augustine heard it, and is still heard to-day. 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, yea, and for ever.'

Here is a passage from a letter written three or four years back : ' One winter night I sat up late in my study, poring over the newest elaborate *apologia* for belief, until I fell asleep by the fire. Before daybreak a ploughman woke me on his way to work ; as he tramped along the frosty road under my window he was singing, and I heard the words :

" My God, the spring of all my joys,
The life of my delights,
The glory of my brightest days,
And comfort of my nights,
In darkest shades if Thou appear
My dawning is begun !
Thou art my soul's sweet morning star,
And Thou my rising sun ! "

' Somehow, that hymn penetrated my heart with an unearthly thrill of conviction which none of the evidence-books could achieve. The philosophers might argue in favour of Theism : the ploughman was rejoicing in his experience of the love of God.'

And the writer of the letter ?

CHAPTER V

FIRE AND SWORD

Even the testimony of the martyrs has not ceased.

The attempts of the French priests to evangelise Madagascar ended in 1672 in tragic failure; and the Malagasy were a heathen people when the first missionaries of the London Missionary Society landed in 1818. England had concluded a treaty with Radama I. for the suppression of the slave-trade, and under the rule of that enlightened sovereign infanticide was abolished, sorcery and other superstitions were checked, the language was reduced to writing, schools were founded, and the translation of the Scriptures was begun.

The Bible Society contributed liberally to the production of this new version, and the Gospel of St. Luke was issued in 1828. In that year the friendly Radama died. His son was but a child, and Ránaválona, his sister and queen-wife, succeeded to the throne. She was a fanatic, enthralled by the idolatries of

her people, but happily the divine will restrained for a time her hatred of Christianity.

In 1830 the New Testament was in circulation, was read by the natives at their firesides and in nearly a hundred schools in the capital and for many miles round it, and prayer-meetings had been established. Five years later, when there were some two hundred baptized Christians and about a thousand adherents, an edict of the queen proscribed all public worship, and forbade under the penalty of death or confiscation and slavery prayer to God, reading of the Scriptures, and intercourse with Christians. The missionaries were expelled, but not before they had been able to give the people the complete Bible in their own tongue.

In 1836 Rasalama (sometimes called Rafaravavy), a lady of some distinction and an early convert, was betrayed by her slaves. To the threats of the queen and the pleadings of her old heathen father, 'I know,' she replied, 'in whom I have believed, and though my blood may be shed and my body left for the dogs, the Word of God must prosper in this country.' She was spared the extreme penalty, but was heavily fined. In the following year she was again arrested, but all efforts to obtain from

her the names of her fellow-Christians proved unavailing. Fifteen other persons who had been arrested were condemned to lifelong servitude, but she was condemned to death. Ránaválona forbade her to pray, but she seldom spoke except to pray or to preach. She prayed in her heavy chains, she preached to her guards, and to the crowd which followed her to execution. She was still praying when she fell, pierced through by the doomsman's spear, on the 14th of August 1837.

For twenty-five years the Malagasy converts worshipped in their 'Catacombs'—the caves and the deserts. The queen's executioners were constantly in pursuit, but neither vigilance nor severity could stay the spread of Christianity.

Among those who suffered in 1849 were four of noble birth. It was unlawful to shed their blood, and they were sentenced to be burnt alive at Faravohitra, at the northern edge of the plateau on which Tananarivo stands.

It was a day of flying showers and bursts of sunshine. On the way to execution, says the native account, 'the Christians sang the hymn beginning "When our hearts are troubled," each verse ending with "Then remember us." Thus they sang on the road.'

Two of the four were husband and wife, and the woman was near the hour of motherhood. 'And when they came to Faravohitra, there they burned them, fixed between split spars,' with more wood heaped about them. As the faggots kindled, the woman's child was born. No hand of pity was reached out to save it. 'And there was a rainbow in the heavens at the time, close to the place of burning'—so close, indeed, that the end of the bow seemed to rest on the martyrs, a marvellous sight, at which some of the spectators fled in terror.

'They sang again, even while in the fire. Then they prayed, saying, "O Lord, receive our spirits, for Thy love to us has caused this to come to us; and lay not this sin to their charge." Thus they prayed, as long as they had any life. Then they died, but softly, gently; gentle, indeed, was the going forth of their life. And astonished were all the people around who beheld the burning of them there.'

Through those long years of persecution the only counsellor, the only comforter to whom the Malagasy believers could turn, was the Word of God. In the hands of the native teachers that was enough. Ten thousand people were said to have suffered for their

faith. At long intervals letters from the island brought greetings to England ' from all pilgrims, all captives, all the brethren,' and pleaded for remembrance : ' Like cold water in a hot and thirsty land is the word coming from friends far away.'

In secret, in the city, in some mountain cave or a hollow among the boulders, the Scriptures were read, while keen eyes watched ' with the field-glasses you sent us.' For safety the books were at times buried ; at times, too, in some access of terror, they were burnt. When they became scarce, texts and passages were copied and distributed in writing.

One knows not how many victims were sentenced to the fever-stricken wilderness, where they were guarded by spearsmen. The massive chains which linked man to man were so heavy that it took two months to make the three days' journey to the wilds. Many died on the way ; many more in the desert places. But the sign of ' the rainbow in the heavens close to the place of burning ' was never forgotten. It became the token of another covenant, and in its light the people suffered and died, happy.

Amid strange rumours, while a great red light glowed along the dark hills and eerie

voices sounded from the ancestral tombs, the savage spirit of Ránaválona passed away in August 1861. Her son Radama, who was a Christian, became king, and for a little while men could breathe freely. So greatly had the numbers of the small 'Martyr Church' increased that when a fresh supply of the Scriptures from the Bible House reached the capital the mission station was besieged for three days by crowds of eager purchasers.

Nearly forty years had gone by when, in June 1900, the rising of the Boxers—the Chinese 'Patriots of the Big Fist'—began in Shantung, spread into three other provinces, and swept like wildfire through Manchuria. Within a few weeks nearly every Christian place of worship, scores of mission compounds and schools, hospitals, Bible depots were plundered and destroyed. No fewer than 180 missionaries and their wives, lady missionaries, and children, and at least 5000 native Protestants and 25,000 Roman Catholics perished.

Many indeed were slain in blind fury, but again and again the old heathen issue was raised: 'Christ and death; Buddha and life.' Women and men stood that test with

the glorious fortitude of the early martyrs. 'Repent?' exclaimed old blind Ch'ang of Taipingkow. 'I repented long ago, and believe in Christ'; and that grey head in which the New Testament lived memorised from the first verse of *Matthew* to the last of *Revelation* fell severed as he spoke. The old colporteur Han Yehshan preached to the raging mob. Little they knew, he told them, if they thought to destroy Christianity by burning churches; 'in three years there would be three times as many Christians in Yenshan.' The Boxers seized him and laid him in the straw-cutter as though he had been a sheaf. Women died singing under the sword, and their heads were hung by the hair from the branches of trees; Chinese Christians and Biblemen expired in flames like the 'living torches' in Nero's gardens.

There were numbers, indeed, who in their terror abjured the name of Christ, but very many more were steadfast to the end. Those who escaped to the hills and glens hid their copies of the Scriptures, and bade their children remember the spot, for though there was little hope of their ever seeing a white missionary again, they might still continue to be true followers of Christ. One little girl whose

father had already been murdered was discovered in a millet-field by the Boxers. They threatened and even tortured her, but they could not force her to tell where her father's Bible was hidden; and in their fury they slew her.

A number of missionaries and all but one of the Bible Society's agents were warned in time to escape, but in Shansi Mr. and Mrs. Beynon and their children—a girl of eleven and two boys, one of seven and the other of nine years—were lured to the *yamen* at Taiyuan with treacherous promises, stripped to the waist like criminals, and brutally put to death.

CHAPTER VI

THE BOOK SPEAKS

Long ago, in 1849, on the Savage Island, afterwards called Niué, a mysterious fetish saved the lives of Paulo the Samoan evangelist and his wife, the first Christians to settle on the island. It was a Book which Paulo carried everywhere, to which he spoke, and which talked with him. Two of the fiercest island warriors were chosen to slay them. With many-coloured feathers woven into their wild hair, the Savages stole up to the Samoan hut thatched with palm-leaves. Paulo sat beside it, talking with his Book. They waited among the trees, but still he read on, with a bright and peaceful face. A cold hand of fear was laid upon them both ; their spears shook, their limbs were powerless. Again they attempted to approach him, but they could not free themselves from their dread ; this thing they found they could not do.

In time, indeed, they came to know that the Book was speaking to the souls of men in

a more wonderful sense than they had ever dreamed of.

Many years have gone by since Baba Daya Ram and his wife lived in Rajputana. They were devout Gauri Brahmans, but for Daya Ram there was so little peace of soul in his creed that he was ready to make any sacrifice if he could but find God. About 1865 he parted from his beloved wife and set out on a long pilgrimage to the sacred places of India. Once a year he returned home for a few days, and then resumed his eager quest. Travelling from shrine to shrine, he sought instruction from the 'holy men' who dwelt there, but they could give him no guidance, no assurance to help him on his way.

In the thirteenth year of his wanderings he met in Agra a native Christian, who, on hearing his story, directed him to a missionary in Farukhabad. The missionary gave him a Bible, and for two years he studied it alone in the jungle, until he discovered the God of his seeking. Whether 'Rajput' or not, he now knew himself for a 'King's son,' and to the end of his life the joy and peace of the Resurrection never failed him.

In the Eighteen-eighties a Chinese colporteur, travelling among the villages of Fokien, came upon a Chinese story-teller and offered him a Gospel. He could not prevail upon him even to accept it, and so he begged of him to take care of it for him. The little book, laid by, had been for several years well-nigh forgotten, when one night the story-teller dreamed that he was on the mountains in the dark. A light which he had followed went on as he was moving along a narrow ledge over a precipice, and the terrors of sleep fell upon him. When all hope was lost, the colporteur, suddenly appeared at his side, took his hand, and led him to a palace alive with light and music. The dream was so vivid that the story-teller felt it must have some meaning. He inquired for the colporteur, but could not find him ; then he looked up the Gospel left in his charge, read it and re-read it, and became a Christian.

About this time other Biblemen came to one of these villages. The people had long been poor ; young women dragged plough and harrow in the fields ; worn men, laden with salt and fish from the sea, toiled up the rocky tracks through the lovely scenery of Sianin, ' the Gardens of the Fairies ' ;

but now the village was smitten with cholera.

The colporteurs found a despairing crowd worshipping an idol with strange rites. 'How can this block of wood deliver you?' they asked, and began to speak to them so earnestly of the one God who could hear and help them that the idol was dragged from the temple and hewn to pieces. Neither sudden death nor fire from heaven avenged this act of rejection; but shortly afterwards the story-teller —the favourite story-teller of these villages— appeared under the banyan-tree with 'new words' for them.

'For six years and more,' he said, 'I have told you those old tales, but I never found that they changed your character, or mine, for the better. The reading of this book has. And these are the stories I shall now tell.' It was the Gospel of St. Luke that he showed them, and his stories were of Bethlehem and the Magi, of the teaching and the miracles of our Lord, of His death, and of His Resurrection.

Far away in the Panjab, in these same 'eighties, Gopal Singh was a boy attending the village school of Gill, which was visited weekly by a missionary. There he listened

attentively to the Bible lessons, the like of which he had never heard before, learned many passages from the Gospels and Psalms, and when he was old enough, began to teach in a small school of his own.

At the age of eighteen he resolved to be baptized, but on hearing of his intention, the men of the village carried him off by night, and compelled him to join a Sikh regiment in which relatives of his could keep a watch upon him. His father was dead ; his mother was blind ; he was her only son, and was forced to yield.

On taking his discharge he married ; two or three children were born, and his mother was living with him. He had never forgotten the Gospels and Psalms of his boyhood, and now they were rising up in his mind so constantly that he asked to be baptized. The missionary to whom he went was prepared to receive him, but it was on one condition : 'Go home,' he said, 'and tell your people that you are a Christian.' 'That I cannot do,' replied Gopal Singh sadly ; 'my mother is old and blind, and dependent on me. I dread to think what rash act she might feel driven to commit, were I to tell her suddenly. I *will* tell her, but I must wait for the right

moment.' 'Then I fear I cannot baptize you.'

The years went by, and at the mission house good reports were heard of Gopal Singh—of his friendliness to village preachers, his helpfulness to Christians, his good offices to Government officials. His wife died, and then his mother, and he was free; but his children, who had missed the Christian schooling he had longed to give them, were growing up. He fell ill, and when he was able to be about again, he was but a feeble old man, no longer master of his house, in which a young daughter-in-law had taken control.

One day he presented himself at the mission compound, faint and worn out. 'I have come to be a Christian,' he said. It was the schoolboy speaking in this shadow of a man. He was baptized on the last day of 1922, and for a few months he bore witness to Christ among his own people.

Here is a story of to-day, drawn from an autobiographical account. Born in 1899 in the Madura district, Southern India, Krishnaswamy was brought up from childhood in the piety of a devout Hindu home. As a boy of five he knew the names of the gods, and had

been told the legends of their goodness to mankind, and especially to their worshippers.

The three months of the summer holidays he used to spend with his grandmother, whose village was the centre of many temples under the direction of his people. On special days he saw the idols washed, amid the chanting of many prayer-charms (*mantras*), anointed with fragrant oils, draped in costly robes, and decked with jewels. He was taught the usual temple-rites, and when the menfolk were busy away in the rice-fields and cotton-plantations, he took their places, carried in the prescribed food prepared by the women, and presented it to the gods with trembling hands and faltering prayers.

After the holidays he returned to his Hindu school in Madura, where he learned English. Always mindful of the observances of his caste, he read the sacred books and frequented the temples. So far he knew nothing of the Christian religion. One sultry evening in 1914 he went out for his usual walk, crossed the river, and came upon some of his schoolfellows who were on their way to the American College. Out of curiosity he went in with them. It was the Bible Society's annual distribution of the Scriptures in English to Hindu

graduates and undergraduates. The District Judge presided ; the Society's Madras Secretary gave an address, and two ladies presented the books. Though Krishnaswamy had no right to share in the distribution, one of the ladies pressed him to take a volume, and he accepted.

It was a charming little book with gilt edges, and when opened, he found it to be novel and strangely attractive. Morning and evening *The Gospels* and *The Acts* absorbed him. To his mother's surprise 'The Rámáyana' and 'Bhárata' were neglected. She spoke to his father of the little golden book, and when he had glanced at it: 'It is a good book,' he said, 'and it will help him to get a good English style. Let him read it.' Then turning to the lad, he said, 'I will get you a copy of this in Tamil ; it will assist you to understand difficult passages.'

For Krishnaswamy life began to unfold a new meaning. People were not slow to notice the change. He ceased to speak of the Hindu gods ; the traditions of caste could not withstand belief in the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God ; and he ceased to dread the spirits of evil which once haunted lonely places after sundown. Some

people said that he was not quite in his right mind.

By ' a curious chance ' he came for the first time upon a meeting at which men were preaching the Lord Jesus Christ. These ' outcastes,' as he had heard them called, were proclaiming the very Master whom he had learned to love in his little book, and were striving to follow in His footsteps. He made up his mind to join them. He had not counted on the persecution which at once began, or the jealous watch which was kept on all his movements. He became acquainted, however, with two young missionaries who greatly assisted him, and on a Sunday evening in 1916 he was baptized in the West Gate Church, Madura.

The rules of his caste forbade him to return to his home, and a missionary befriended him, but on the following day his father appeared and took him by force back to his family. A time of severe trial followed. His Bible was taken away, and he was put under rigorous training. He fell ill, and was confined to his bed for nearly a year. After his recovery his mother asked him to buy something for her in the *bazar*. He noticed that the paper in which it was wrapped was a leaf of the

Tamil Bible. It was truly a 'godsend,' and on all future errands he went to the same shop and was twice given other leaves.

Later he was allowed to join his old school. There he met a friend of his pre-Christian days who had also been deeply impressed by the reading of Krishnaswamy's little gilt book. They agreed to seek a place where they might live the Christian life unmolested, and shortly before Christmas 1918 they disappeared.

It was not long before they were traced to their refuge in Tinnevelly. Relatives and friends kept coming and going; there were earnest entreaties, many embraces, much weeping. Plots were laid by some of the non-Christian townspeople, and the young men had some wonderful escapes. Six years went by, and one morning in 1924, sitting alone in the offices of the Madras Auxiliary of the Bible Society, a young man wrote the narrative from which these experiences have been taken.

And Krishnaswamy's friend? *He* prayed and waited for years for his girl-wife to respond to the divine call. At length, in June 1924, she was baptized, and to-day they are both preparing to serve their Master in the ministry of healing.

In a Bechuana kraal, in 1838, a tribesman stopped puzzled before a family group. 'What are those things you are turning over and over?' he asked. 'Is it food?' 'No, it is the Word of God.' 'Why do you talk to it?' 'We do not talk to the Book; it is talking to us.' 'Does it speak?' 'Yes, it speaks to the heart.'

CHAPTER VII

HEARTS THAT HEARD

Yes, the Book speaks, and these are among the hearts which heard and answered in many countries and in many languages.

An old Mongolian who had read a Gospel came to the missionary at Hsuanhuafu. 'I used to be a good man before I ever saw the Gospel of Matthew,' he said, 'but since I have seen that Gospel I have become a big sinner. Ah, my sins are too great!' He had attended the mission meetings for nine months, had cast out his idols, and now wished to be a Christian.

Walking down Little Bourke Street, Melbourne, a lad came upon a man lying drunk on the foot-path. He stopped and looked at him, wondering what he ought to do, but he did not see how he could help him. As he turned to go, his hand dropped against the pocket in which he carried his Bible, and his eyes brightened with the thought that occurred to him. His mother had given him that Bible, but he was sure she would be pleased

with his thought. He took out the book, slipped it gently into the man's pocket, and left him.

Years afterwards the lad, now a young man, was shooting outside Wangarata, Victoria, and had just chosen a place beside a stream for his midday rest when he saw that a man had pitched his camp among the trees close by. The stranger at once invited him to come and sit down, and after some refreshment they fell into conversation. This, he said, was his home, and he worked on the farms round about. It was a strange chance that had brought him there. He had been a dissipated wretch in Melbourne, but one day when he came to his senses he had found a Bible in his pocket. He began to read it, and it soon compelled him to give up that kind of life. The stranger took up from the grass a book by his side. 'This,' he said, 'is the very book that put me right.' The young man opened it. It was his mother's gift. He handed it back in silence.

Fifteen years ago, when the Word of God had a free course from the Urals to the Eastern seas, a colporteur was in the market-place of Osa, a town in Siberia. A beggar about

fifty years of age caught sight of him and came up to him eagerly. 'Ah, you don't know how long I have waited for this book,' he said, taking up a copy of the Four Gospels. 'I shall never part with this; it will give me some peace. I have let myself drift, I have gone through a world of sin. Now with God's help I shall be a better man.' 'I talked a long time with him,' said the colporteur, 'and he bought a copy of the Psalms also before he left me.'

Tschen was an old Chinaman of Taitou on the Pearl Mountains in Shantung, who made his living in the neighbouring market-places by 'peeping into the future' for people, at the rate of thirty *cash* or sixty *cash* according to the expectancy of his patrons. He bought a Gospel from a colporteur and then a New Testament, and as he began to read, his mind was stirred by strange thoughts at the very name of 'Jesus'—'Saviour.' Not long afterwards, when he was passing through the streets of Kiaotschao, he came upon a number of books which a scholar had laid out on the pavement to dry in the sun, as his library was damp. Tschen knelt down to look more closely at these treasures—the Chinese classics and the celebrated Dictionary of Kangshi, and

something prompted him to take up one of the many volumes of the Dictionary. He opened it, and there, under his eyes, was the name of Jesus, 'the Saint of the West,' 'the Saviour of the World.'

He rose and went on his way, astonished and deeply moved. While he was foretelling a bright and happy future to others in the market-place, he felt how dark and forlorn was his own. But in the Word of God there was comfort and hope, and he too in the East found a Saviour in Jesus. He was baptized on Christmas Day 1905, Bible in hand, and took for his new name 'Kin-Kwong,' which means 'Behold, I have come to the Light.' Within a year six other Chinamen had with his help found the 'one Pearl of great price' on those mountains, and Tschen had become a colporteur.

At Torralba in Spain a colporteur called at the house of a sergeant in the barracks of the civil guard. The sergeant told him that he already owned a Testament, which he and his wife had long studied, and he had often read it to his comrades and their families. His wife was now dead. In her last hours no priest was called in to give her Extreme

Unction ; all she asked for was that the New Testament should be constantly read to her. On the pillow beside her lay the crucifix usually placed beside the dying. 'I do not need that,' she said more than once ; 'what I want is Christ in my heart. Remind me of His promises, for I know that He will fulfil them.' 'Afterwards,' said the sergeant, 'the wife of another guardsman asked me for the book which had given my wife such comfort. I gave it to her ; so, you see, I must have another Testament to-day.'

Not long ago there was a Burmese villager living near Prome—a drunkard, a gambler, and 'a terror' not only in his own house, but in the whole district. A colporteur called at his door and sold his wife a New Testament. She read it secretly for weeks through dread of her husband, but at length her trust in God would not suffer her to conceal her belief longer. In spite of abuse and ill-treatment she made open profession of her faith, and read to her children daily from the Gospels. With patient cheerfulness she carried her burden to the end. When she was dead her husband's eyes were opened ; the one human being who cared for him was gone. As he

went about the silent house he noticed the book which he had so often seen in her hands. He was tempted to tear it to pieces ; he sat down instead and began to read it. And he, too, heard it speaking, and his heart listened. He sought out the colporteur, and was taken by him to the missionary. The change wrought in the man's character was the wonder of all who knew him. This happened in 1914, and in 1917 he had taken up the work of colportage.

About the year 1915 two Chinamen at North Bay, Ontario, bought a diglot Gospel to help them in learning English. As the result of their reading they both became Christians. Then there occurred one of the strange incidents which do happen in the spiritual life of earnest men. One of them returned to China to carry the good tidings of the Gospel to his own people ; the other remained in North Bay to make money so that he might help to support his friend the evangelist in China. Later he too returned to his home and assisted his friend.

In Turkish Arabia, just before the Great War, a Jew who had bought a copy of the

Epistle to the Hebrews asked a colporteur for the New Testament. 'That is the *Injil*,' said another Jew who was standing near, 'and the *Injil* is a forbidden book for you.' 'I tasted the food,' was the quiet reply, 'and now I come to the table.'

Between eight and nine years ago Doña Mariana da Silva, who lived on the outskirts of Manáos, the capital of Amazonas, Brazil, happened to see a Bible in the house of a friend whom she was visiting. She was so deeply impressed by what she read of it that she could not rest until she had a copy of her own. The book became her daily companion, and the more she read, the more certain she became that this was indeed a message from God.

About this time her husband was called to the south on military service, and when he left she packed a Bible in his kit in the hope that it might guide him in the life that lay before him. In 1917 Doña Mariana made public profession of her faith; whereupon many of her friends fell away from her. Yet, however lonely the house might be, there was a serene trust in her heart which never failed her. On her husband's return he was so conscious of the spiritual influence in their home that

in 1920 they were both of one faith. The house was again filled with friends ; public worship was held there every Tuesday evening, and many of the neighbours came in for the usual night prayers.

Her husband had a friend to whom he used to pass on all evangelistic literature, and the friend in turn forwarded it to a brother in Humaythá, a forest-town over a thousand miles away, in the interior of Amazonas, where, if ever, a preacher of the Gospel had rarely been. The brother became an inquirer, a Bible was sent to him, and the Word of God brought him to the knowledge he was seeking amid the mediæval superstitions of that far region of Brazil.

In the spring of 1905 a Japanese colporteur travelling in the mountain district of Hiroshima sold a Bible to a schoolmaster whose purpose in buying it was to prove to his students and others how false the great book of Christianity really was. To his own astonishment, as he read it from day to day, he found himself irresistibly convinced of the love and patience of the Almighty God. By the time summer drew to a close he was a whole-hearted believer, and he and his household were bap-

tized. Persecution and privation followed for all of them, but, nothing daunted, he decided to devote himself to the service of the faith he had hoped to ridicule, worked his way through a course of theological study, and to-day (1925) the schoolmaster, a fully ordained minister, is the Rev. Gisaku Horiye of Emmanuel Church, Tokyo. A treasure which he shows his friends is a Bible thrice rebound during twenty years of daily use at family prayers.

In 1908 there occurred in the Transvaal an incident which strangely recalls the beautiful story told seven hundred years ago by Clement of Alexandria of St. John the Beloved Disciple. In a batch of coolies leaving for South Africa there was a Chinaman who promised the father of a young lad that he would look after his son and protect him from evil in the new country. They had not been long in the Transvaal before the youth was led astray, was induced to join a gang of gamblers, and lost his life in some gaming quarrel. In his bitter self-reproach that he had failed so miserably in his promise to the lad's father, the coolie deliberately killed the leader of the gang. He was tried for murder, convicted, and sentenced to death. In his prison at

Pretoria he was visited by a lay-worker of the South African Compounds Mission, who gave him a New Testament. The coolie read it eagerly, and the new light kindled a great hope in his heart. On the morning of his execution the lay-worker, who accompanied him to the gallows, saw him take the book and conceal it in his breast. 'You must not put your trust in the book itself as a charm,' said the lay-worker gently, 'but believe in the truth which it has taught you.' 'I know that,' said the Chinaman; 'but this book has taught me that Jesus Christ is my Saviour, and I put it nearest my heart in thankfulness for what it has taught me.'

In that voice which 'speaks to the heart' there is a spell which subdues the ancient and most untractable hatred in the heart of man —the racial and tribal blood-feud and the family vendetta. In the 'forties of last century, when the New Testament had become 'The Great Treasure' of the fierce yet chivalrous natives of New Zealand, a Maori was seen to withdraw suddenly from the semicircle before the Communion table and go back the whole length of the church to his seat; and then, in a little while, to return and par-

take of the Sacrament. When he was asked to explain his curious conduct, 'When I approached the table,' he replied, 'I did not know whom I should have to kneel beside. Then I suddenly saw that I was next to a man who some years ago slew my father and drank his blood. And that man I had then sworn I would kill the first time I saw him. So I went back to my seat. And as I sat there I saw in the spirit the sanctuary on high, and I seemed to hear a voice saying, "Thereby shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye love one another." That made a deep impression on me; and at the same time I thought I saw another sight, a Cross and a Man nailed upon it; and I heard *Him* say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Then I went back to the altar.'

Just about the Centenary of the Bible Society Giuseppe Pisano was doing excellent Bible work in Sardinia, and discovering in well-worn copies of the Scriptures the labours of the old colporteurs. He was himself a Sardinian, and a convert of the Cagliari Baptist Mission. His stepfather was shot in the dark, and by the law of the vendetta he became the avenger; but he too had heard

the voice and refused to shed blood for blood, and his reasons satisfied his mother and the neighbours that he was right.

To-day the words of a South African missionary help to show that the spell of the voice which speaks to the heart is not limited by language or race : 'The words of the great Teacher come to him (the African)—"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another." This makes it possible for the Matabele and the Mashona to kneel at the same Communion table.'

CHAPTER VIII

THE MAN THAT GOD SENT

WORKING along the north shore of Georgian Bay, Ontario, a colporteur called at the house of a Roman Catholic lady. 'Who is that?' the lady asked as the little girl went to the door. 'The man that God sent,' her daughter answered.

Question and answer are jotted down in the Bibleman's report without comment or explanation; and indeed it may well be that the child's curious reply needs no explanation, for not once, but times without number, the colporteur, arriving in an hour of distress, bereavement, or anxiety, has been welcomed and long remembered as 'The man that God sent.'

In north-western France a colporteur visited a house where a man was lying seriously ill. He found the wife in deep trouble. 'Oh,' she said, 'the priest called, but my husband would not see him. He would not confess. He is lost for ever, my dear husband, with

whom I have lived for twenty-eight years!' At the sight of the colporteur the man raised himself up in bed. 'This is the priest I want!' he cried, and dropped back on his pillow. 'You come in time, sir,' he continued when he had recovered his breath, 'to bring me the comfort I need. My soul seeks peace with God before I leave the world. Will you pray for me?' The colporteur knelt by his bedside and prayed. 'Now I can depart,' said the dying man; 'I am forgiven by Jesus my Saviour. Lord, bless Thy servant whom Thou hast sent to me to speak to me of Thy love.' As the colporteur left the house, the man's wife, weeping, kissed his hand.

At Bordeaux another Bibleman visited a poor woman who was nearing the end of her life. He spoke to her of the Saviour, the Friend of the poor. 'Oh, I know Him,' she said. 'I learned to know Him from this little book that you see on the cupboard. You could not believe the good it has done me. I have peace in my heart. I have known better days, but I hardly suffer from my poverty, for I leave everything to God.' A few days later he met one of her two sons. 'I shall never forget,' he said, 'the heavenly peace in which my mother died. She never

complained, but prayed, or asked me to pray, till she drew her last breath. She closed her eyes as for a sweet slumber.'

With another of these good men in western France the sight of a lonely house half a mile or more away seldom failed to take him off the high road into lanes and fields. Often enough he turned aside to no purpose, but on one occasion he saw as he drew near that the door was open, and he found both the farmer and his wife at home. When he told his errand the woman's face lit up. 'God Himself sends you!' she exclaimed. She and her husband on returning from a funeral had bought a book like one of those he had, and she was reading aloud when they overtook a priest. They offered him a seat in the cart, and then the trouble began. He insisted on seeing their book, and threatened if it was not given up to him to have them turned out of their farm. 'You see, *monsieur*, here in the country we are not free. The priest is disliked, but we have to bear with him all the same.' After a long conversation they bought a New Testament, and the colporteur returned light-hearted to the road.

In the province of Algiers a woman to whom a colporteur offered a New Testament took

it gladly and paid for it. 'I am a widow,' she said, 'with eight young children to provide for, and I shall probably miss this money when I have to buy them bread.' On hearing this, the colporteur wished to return the money, but she would not have it. 'I draw all my strength from God,' she said, 'and I am sure He will not forsake either me or my children.'

Another woman, in the province of Constantine, who had bought a Gospel, asked the colporteur for a New Testament on his next visit. 'I have been most anxious to get this book,' she said. 'I have had to withdraw my two girls from the catechism class because of the priest. I am most anxious for them to have religious instruction, and I can teach them from this book. It is the Lord who has sent you to me.'

The weather was so bad at Schaviah on the Morocco coast that the colporteurs could not pitch a tent, and the owner of a hut was unwilling to let them have a room except at an exorbitant price. While they were bargaining, a Moor to whom a Gospel had been sold on an earlier visit came in and whispered in the owner's ear. The man's face instantly brightened. 'Was it he who sold you the *Injil*? The same man?' he exclaimed. 'He

is welcome ! He is welcome ! The room is his, for I want such a friend.' The room was cleared ; a fire was lit just outside the door to cook the Bibleman's supper ; and later in the evening crowds of people came—many of them road-stained travellers also—and listened round the fire to the story of the Lord Jesus, and had His very words read and explained to them.

The father of Dai Chen-hai, one of the colporteurs of the Shantung Sub-agency, was bitterly opposed to his son's conversion. As soon as he saw him bow his head to say grace at meals, or bend his knee to pray, he would drive him out of the house. No word was allowed to be spoken about Christianity ; but the son would leave the New Testament where it was sure to be seen, and at last the father's curiosity compelled him to open the book. He read a little at first, then a great deal ; became a zealous believer, spoke freely of the Christian doctrine, knelt to pray, and finally asked to be baptized.

In Bohemia, in the pre-War days, at one of the houses at which the colporteur called, a man lay paralysed in bed, and his wife was at his side reading prayers from a book. Three years he had lain there ; money had been

spent on doctors, things had been bought from the Church, they had prayed long to St. Anthony, but there had been no change for the better. The colporteur asked the wife if she had ever prayed to Jesus to help them, and she gave no answer. He then read her the story of the man lame from his birth, and repeated the Lord's promise, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.' The sick man's tears rolled down his cheeks, and the wife asked for a Bible. It was taken to them shortly afterwards, and she paid more than the price, so that copies of the Gospels might be given away to very poor people.

'In our family there are eight brothers including yourself; you are the only one who is a Christian. You say that you serve an all-loving and all-powerful God. How is it then that you are suffering all kinds of privation? Look at us; none of us are in want, we have all we need. How is it you have not? The reason is clear: you have left our religion and are serving another God. Therefore we do not want your Bibles; we can get on as we have done without them.' It was in Colombo, Ceylon. The speaker was a Sinhalese of an influential Buddhist family. The brother, the

Christian, was out on his first venture as a colporteur. He admitted that they were doing better than he from a worldly point of view; but he enjoyed many blessings which they had never experienced. He read to them the parable of Dives and Lazarus, to which they, and especially his mother, listened attentively. It so impressed them that the first copy of the Scriptures sold by him went to his family. He called on them regularly to speak to them of the Word of God. Sometimes they gave ear to him, sometimes they mocked, 'but my dear old mother,' he wrote, 'has at last found the truth of the Christian religion.'

Several months after the earthquake which wrecked Messina in Sicily and Reggio in Calabria towards the end of 1908, a colporteur offered the Scriptures to an Italian gentleman. 'Are you bold enough to speak of this God of yours?' the Italian asked with flashing eyes. 'Had He existed He would not at one stroke have deprived me of my livelihood—some ten thousand *lire* from property at Messina—and left me, and thousands like me, in squalid poverty.' The man declared that he had led a decent life, had given freely of his means to the Church and the poor, and yet that was how God had treated him. He believed no

longer in a Divine Being, infinitely kind, just, and powerful.

With sympathetic words the colporteur reminded him how little there is in life that men can call their own. We bring nothing into the world, and we shall take nothing out of it, except indeed our own sinfulness. He told him the story of Job, the man of Uz, who in the midst of overwhelming calamities, bereft of his children, unhelped by his wife, reproached by his friends, was still able to bless the name of the Lord. He besought the *signore* to refrain from judging God, and finally reminded him of God's own Son, who chose the manger, the workshop, the wandering life in which He had not where to lay His head, and finally the Cross, that He might redeem mankind.

The gentleman was deeply moved. Tears stood in his eyes as he embraced and kissed the colporteur, and thanked God for having sent him that way.

This Bibleman, too, was surely among the men that God sent. A Chinese colporteur in the Hankow Sub-agency visited a friend who was dying. As soon as he entered the room he saw that the end was very near; yet with what little strength the dying man had,

a Bible was clasped in his hands. 'Ah yes,' said his kindly visitor, 'I understand your thought. You are asking Almighty God to remember how you have loved His holy Word, and you want Him now to see how you trust it to the very last. But you are not so strong now, dear friend, as you were once; take this small Gospel of St. Mark instead.' He placed the little book gently between the wasted hands, and the dying man held it until he passed away peacefully into his rest. Almost from the time of his own conversion this Chinese Christian had day after day gone into the church to pray for his unbelieving wife. This last act of faith as he lay dying had gone to her heart. Before her husband was laid in his grave she declared her trust in Him who could give such peace of soul in the hour of death, and not long afterwards she was admitted to fellowship.

In his home in the Argentine another man who lay dying heard his wife and his daughters weeping. 'Why do you weep for me?' he asked, with a happy look in his eyes. 'I am going to my Saviour; it is He who is calling me.' This man had never been in a Reformed church, but he had long been a constant reader of the Holy Scriptures. After his

death, his family, who until then had been merely admirers of the Bible as a beautiful Spanish book, began to understand its truth and to feel its spiritual power. They accepted its message, and remembered with gladness how their father used to read it daily.

Long ago, in the early days of colportage, a Bibleman in a village on the sandy heaths of south-western France came upon a woman who was weeping distractedly over her dead son. On her son's breast lay his Bible, which she had placed there with the words, 'If thou art really what my son said, bring him to life again and I will worship thee.' Her son had said it was a book which worked miracles; it had been his joy, his happiness. The colporteur listened, deeply moved, then opened the book, read, and explained: 'I am the resurrection'; 'Yea, Lord, I believe Thou art Christ, the Son of God.' They knelt in prayer, and though the woman still wept, it was without the bitterness of a rebellious heart.

During the fighting at the Paris barricades during the four June days of 1848, one of the Garde Mobile fell mortally wounded into the arms of an officer. 'Take a little book from my knapsack,' said the dying man; 'it is the Gospels. Read it and bear in mind my last

words—it is the Word of God ; it can teach you the only sure way of salvation.' A few months later the officer, stricken down with illness, was dying in a remote hamlet. A colporteur came to the door, and offered him a Bible. 'It is God Himself who has sent you,' said the officer, 'to be a consolation to me in my last days.' He told what had happened at the barricades. 'I read his book,' he added, 'I love his book. I am longing to know the whole of the Word of God.'

CHAPTER IX

WITH THE BIBLEMAN

These experiences of 'the man that God sent' recall in some way the early colporteurs whose labours we seldom remember.

The first Bibleman whose name has come down to us was Quadratus, of whom Eusebius the Historian has given an all too brief account. Eusebius speaks of him as 'renowned along with the daughters of Philip for prophetic gifts'; [1] and he relates how Quadratus and his companions travelled over various countries, preaching Christ, and 'delivering the books of the divine Gospels' to those who had not yet heard the Word of Truth.

When Hadrian visited Athens, A.D. 125, Quadratus wrote an *Apologia* for Christian belief, which was presented, and not without effect, to the Emperor. A single passage, preserved by Eusebius, is all that survives of the *Apologia*, and one feels that what Quadratus

[1] Philip the Evangelist, whose daughters in their girlhood may have seen our Lord (Acts xxi. 8-9).

in his old age wrote to the Emperor he must have often repeated in his earlier years when he was preaching and circulating the Scriptures :

'But the works of our Saviour were ever present (to men's eyes), for they were genuine —the people healed and the people raised from the dead, who were seen not only when they were healed and when they were raised, but were always in evidence. And not merely while the Saviour was on earth, but after His death, too, they were alive for a length of time, so that some of them survived even to our day.'

Pamphilus was another early Bibleman— 'a name thrice dear' to Eusebius, who wrote his life. Born of a rich and esteemed family of Berytus (Beirut, in Syria), Pamphilus became a great scholar and lover of books, transcribed with his own hand a corrected edition of the Bible, and bought large supplies of the Scriptures which he gladly distributed among men and women who desired to read them. After he had been ordained to the priesthood, his eloquence so exasperated the pagans that he was arrested, tortured, and imprisoned by one Roman governor, and put to death by his successor in the year 309.

This phase of early Bible work disappeared, at least in the West, during the great theological controversies, when the laity were no longer exhorted to read the Word of God for themselves, when ecclesiastical authority was dominating the Bible in prescribing the rule of faith, when a Sovereign Pontiff declared that the Book was beyond the understanding of the common people, and when, at length, a Synod (forgetful that the Vulgate was itself a translation into current speech) assumed the right to order a Bible in the vulgar tongue to be given up and burnt.

When the Bibleman came again into notice —in the dawn of the Reformation—he was scarcely to be distinguished from the chapman who attended fairs and markets, travelled from village to village, and called at château and manor house, until, after pleasant bargaining over fine stuffs, necklaces, and jewels, he produced the pearl of great price, a copy of the Scriptures freshly printed in the mother-tongue.

Emerging from the Alpine valleys of Savoy, the Waldenses were the most zealous and active of these Biblemen on the Continent. Le Fèvre d'Etaples' New Testament—the first complete French translation—had scarcely

left the press in 1523 when the *Porte-balles* (Bearers of the Pack) made their appearance. In less than three years a decree of the Parliament of Paris, proclaimed to the sound of trumpets in the public squares, forbade both the sale and the possession of the book. From February 1526 the Scriptures in French, printed abroad, could enter France only as contraband, at the risk of the importer's head.

Such slight effect had this danger on the buoyant faith of the Biblemen that in a little while—to use the words of a Romanist historian—'France was stocked with New Testaments in French.' Even great nobles and men of culture strapped the pack on their shoulders and went on their way trusting to God and in the need of men for the light of His Word. 'Your Holiness shall know,' wrote the Bishop of Chambéry, Savoy, to the Pope in 1528, 'that this detestable heresy comes in upon us from all sides by means of packmen. Our diocese would have been wholly perverted had not the Duke beheaded a dozen lords who had sown these Gospels broadcast.'

We have glimpses of evangelists also among these Biblemen who carried the printed Scriptures in the tongues of the people into France,

Savoy, Piedmont, the Netherlands, Hungary, and Transylvania, while in England, from April 1526, our own chapmen were widely circulating Tindale's New Testament, 'to the inexpressible joy and comfort of many who had long walked in darkness.' [1]

One of these French evangelists, Philibert Hamelin, was a close friend of that gifted and heroic man, Palissy the Potter. Tramping, staff in hand and pack on shoulder, he would pause as he saw the peasants in the fields settling under a tree or in the shade of a hedge for their noonday meal and rest, and would leave the road to rest near them. Little by little he would get into talk with them; would speak of God and His love for them; would tell of the comfort to be found in prayer, and would offer to pray for them. Some would be glad to hear him; others, unused to talk of this kind, would sit staring in silence; and yet others, vexed at the punishment he foretold for unbelief and wickedness, would abuse and threaten him.

Hamelin had been a priest. On his conversion to the evangelical cause he had been imprisoned, but had made his escape and set up as a printer of religious books in Geneva.

[1] Demaus: *William Tindale*, p. 143.

The man, however, was a missionary at heart, and gladly took to the open road. Returning to south-western France, he became the pastor of groups of Gospel-Christians near Saintes, Palissy's town. Again arrested and tried at Bordeaux, he was condemned to death and degraded as an apostate priest at the church of Saint-André. At the place of martyrdom there was a ceaseless fanfare of trumpets, so that the crowds should not hear his voice. On his face, however, they saw the inspiration of prayer. He was strangled by the headsman, and his body was flung on the burning funeral pile.

It seems to me more than likely that it was some record of these men of heroic faith which, in the early part of last century, inspired three brothers—the Messrs. Courtois, bankers of Toulouse—to adopt colportage for the circulation of the Scriptures. Their distributors, no longer chapmen but openly Biblemen travelled through southern France, succeeded to a great extent in allaying Romanist opposition in the Hautes and Basses Pyrénées, and reached the Spanish frontier. The striking success of the Courtois brothers was not lost on Professor Kieffer, the Bible Society's first agent in Paris, and in 1831 the

Committee in London heard how as the Biblemen went up the streets of the capital the tradespeople called to them from the shops, and were glad to buy their books.

Curiously enough, however, the Bible Society's first colporteur was employed in 1827—and with the best results—by the Rev. Henry Leeves, the agent in the Levant, to circulate the Turkish New Testament in Greek type in the towns and villages along the Sea of Marmora. The system was tested and welcomed some years later in England and Ireland. By the jubilee year of the Society its Biblemen, under Victor de Pressensé, had traversed every *département* of France; colporteurs were abroad in Belgium, Holland, Sweden and Norway, the Rhine Provinces, and Bulgaria. Native Christians were circulating the Scriptures in the Madras Presidency and Malacca, and the Word of God had been carried into fifteen of the eighteen provinces of China. The Auxiliaries of Nova Scotia, Montreal, Kingston, and Toronto had their colporteurs and travelling agents; and on the other side of the globe, the Biblemen were busy in Tasmania and in the Bush and the goldfields of Australia.

There, the latest Biblemen combined the

spirit and the purpose of their predecessors—to make known the Gospel to those who had not heard it, and to safeguard it, pure and free, for every man. Never before had colportage been achieved on so large a scale, whether in respect of the range of territory covered or the number of languages in which the Scriptures had been translated.

In 1904, the first year of the second century of the Bible Society, 952 colporteurs were bearing the Word of God far and wide in thirty regions of the world, at an outlay of about £45,000. In that year over 2,274,700 copies of Scripture (Bibles, Testaments, and complete portions) were circulated by them, and a period of splendid activity had begun.

In the ten years ending 1913-14 the number of Biblemen (which varied from 795 to 1225) was an annual average of 1031, and their reports showed them moving through a wonderful variety of landscapes. One saw them in the timber-camps, at the mines, at the isolated farms of Canada; with the rubber-gatherers on the upper waters of the Amazon; in the snowy defiles of the Andes; on the long south-western sea-board of the Pacific; beside the African lakes; along the new Hejas railway running southward from

Damascus ; in the Holy Land itself (the first time for many years) ; in Siberia ; in Turkistan ; among pilgrims at monasteries in Tibet ; and far away south, among the huts and palm-trees on the Malabar coast, where some villagers listened to what they had to say, and others hid themselves in dread of being bewitched by the Christian books. In China, India, and Korea the yearly average was 575 Biblemen.

During the ten years 29,068,979 copies were scattered 'like seed of the sower,' and 13,165,404 fell into the long furrows of China alone. So highly was colportage in China valued that 158 of the native Christians at work there were personally supported by friends in England.

Still more remarkable were the results of the second decade. The number of Biblemen varied from 1174 to 887, but the yearly average throughout the period was 995, and the volumes distributed by them amounted to 49,246,793. In China, India, and Korea a yearly average of 665 colporteurs were employed, and in China itself 27,602,092 copies of Scripture were sold.

Missions of all denominations had quickly perceived, and they warmly acknowledged,

the wonderful manner in which Biblemen blazed the trail for them into the dark regions beyond. 'I do not think,' wrote the Rev. F. Uttley, the Society's agent in Brazil, in 1905, 'that a Protestant church has been organised in Brazil (and such churches can now be counted by the hundred) which has not been originated and continually helped by colportage. I have yet to hear of a visit of a missionary to a place where he has not been preceded by a colporteur, unless indeed he himself has been a colporteur. After between four and five years' experience I do not hesitate to say that Bible distribution and the reading of the Word to the people by the colporteur have done more than anything else to open the homes and hearts of the Brazilians to the Gospel.'

In 1907, when the first elected Assembly assumed the self-government of the Philippine Islands, an American official remarked that the only literature he could find in native homes in the province of Zambles was Bibles and Bible portions left by the colporteur; and these he found in nearly every house. In the Cagayan Valley the Methodist Episcopal missionary was received by three hundred people when he arrived at their town for the

first time—' but the Bible had been there before him.'

' Whether or not there are organised missions in any out-of-the-way corner of the earth,' wrote Bishop Montgomery, secretary of the S.P.G., in 1915, ' the agents of the Bible Society are sure to have penetrated into all such regions.'

In 1921 an American missionary who supervised three of the Society's colporteurs in Korea wrote out of his own experience : ' It is impossible to tell all the good that these men do. They go where no other Christian goes—away up in the mountain recesses or to distant isolated places not known by others. The Word is spoken, and a printed portion of the Word is left behind ; and before anybody is aware, we hear of a little band of Christians meeting together for worship. Perhaps no one person is to be credited with this new group, but certainly the quiet spreading of the Word has a great deal to do with it all.'

CHAPTER X

THE VETERANS

NOWHERE surely shall we meet with more convincing evidence of the power of the Word of God than in the character and the labours of hundreds of these colporteurs. Men of heathen races marvellously drawn to Christ, converts from other creeds, Christians of various Churches, they bore a singular resemblance, not only to each other, but to the Apostles themselves, in their devotedness, their discretion, their sympathy, their patience, and in the courage which shrank from no difficulty, distance, hardship, or danger. Only a sacred enthusiasm could have united them in work from which little worldly gain could be derived, and have kept them steadfast through twenty, thirty, forty years of trying service.

The very heathen themselves bore witness to something unusual about them which they failed to understand. As the crowd who had listened to the story of 'the son who was lost' pressed round the colporteur to buy portions

of Scripture, 'a man interfered,' wrote Peter Josiah of Coimbatore, a year or two ago, 'and said that nobody should buy from me, as my books were not to be read by loyal Hindus. As he spoke he tore a copy in pieces. There was confusion for a few minutes; afterwards I heard them say to one another, "However much we ill-treat these Christian preachers and booksellers, they always come again and again with their preaching and their books. There must be some power, some good spirit, behind them; that is why they are so cheerful and enthusiastic in carrying on their work."'

Let us recall some of the Bible Society's early men. In the year 1814, when Napoleon's retreat to Elba seemed to have restored peace to the world, and Bible Societies were springing up on all sides, with the aid of the London Committee, the Netherlands Bible Society was founded on June 29. Among its early issues a copy of the Scriptures fell into the hands of a young man of Rotterdam, Isaac Van Dorp, son of a builder of fishing-boats and other small craft. He became an eager student of the Bible, and in 1818, at the age of twenty-six, gave himself wholly to the service of Christ.

He read and taught the Word of God among

the Christian people of Rotterdam, and for many a day bore valiant testimony in a neighbouring village, until a faithful pastor was once more appointed to its empty church. For in those distressful days, when rationalism and indifference had fallen like a blight on many of the Reformed clergy, the people in many places had abandoned public worship, and the influence of the Roman priesthood was steadily increasing.

Little is recorded of Isaac's way of life about this time ; but as he approached the forties, he was a lamp-lighter in Rotterdam, and he was often accompanied as he went his rounds by some awakened soul eager to seek his guidance. In 1843, with the concurrence of the Netherlands Society, Mr. Tiddy, the B.F.B.S. agent in Belgium, made the first experiment of colportage in Holland. In the second year Van Dorp became a colporteur. In the first seven years upwards of 260,000 copies were circulated, and of these 50,000 were sold to Roman Catholics. The work was violently opposed by clergy and priests : ' it was the work of the Evil One seeking to cut the root of the tree of eternal life ' ; and for long years there were still Protestants, in a Protestant land which owed all to the Bible,

who did what they could to prevent its circulation. Happily there came an awakening in the Reformed Churches, and a steady growth in the 'Bible' schools, which were raising up new generations of young believers.

As time went by, Van Dorp's house in the Achter Klooster—a little way from the eastern 'havens'—became as well known as the Groote Kerk of St. Lawrence or the bronze statue of Erasmus, and the devoted man grew in honour and troops of friends. In 1865, when he was in his seventy-third year, he was approached by a person of some rank who begged him to place an open Bible in his window, so that passers-by might read. 'Such store do I set by that book,' he said, 'that even a single word, I think, may well be blessed to the salvation of souls. And at dusk set a candle beside the book, so that "the day may be His and the night also may be His"; and I shall bear the cost.'

So the little window was lit in Rotterdam, and day and night people stopped to read the open Bible. The booksellers too took up the idea, and in one of the principal streets of the city a leaf of the great Dutch Bible, the version of the States-General, was turned daily for those who paused before the book which had

made them a free people. Three years later the candle gave place to two bright tulips of gas, and the expense was defrayed by a widow lady.

Meanwhile the staff of the Agency went far and wide through the provinces of the country of the tulip and the stork—travelling along the massive green dykes which hold back the sea from the picturesque villages and farmsteads in the level pastures, or among the trees of the sunken polder-land; visiting the slumbrous, brightly painted cities, decayed indeed, but famous in the old days of the merchant-adventurers; calling at the mighty-sailed mills which enlisted the winds against the ever-threatening waters; boarding the gaily coloured shipping which glided among the villages along the network of water-ways. For the first time the colporteur waded ashore from his lugger to the lonely islands in the North Sea, the wasted fragments of the Dutch coast where forest and meres occupied the site of the Zuider Zee little over six centuries ago.

In 1879 Van Dorp was still in Rotterdam—eighty-seven now, a little shaky in the hands, a little less alert of hearing—and the window was still alight in the Achter Klooster. On the last Sunday of November, as he paid

his usual visit to the Home for Incurables, he had a slight stroke of apoplexy, but recovered sufficiently to read a chapter and give his address. On January 4 following, his ever-youthful spirit passed away in joyful trust. The total circulation of the Agency had then reached 1,000,000 copies. No fewer than 136,000 Bibles and Testaments had passed through his own hands—3855 in the last year of his life.

Twelve years later the Bible work of Holland was left to its own people, and on November 1, 1892, the British Agency was withdrawn, with regret and cordial memories on both sides.

In 1879, the last year of Van Dorp's activity, an agent of the Bible Society, visiting the C.M.S. native Christian schools, orphanage, and chapel at Julfa, the Armenian village quite close to Ispahan, met with two men who were to do admirable service when the Society's Persian Agency was started at Bagdad in the following year. One was a bright Armenian scholar, George Mackertich, who was appointed the first depositary; the other, Benjamin Badal, a Syrian in his thirty-fourth year, 'mighty in the Scriptures,' a preacher in five languages, who became the first colporteur.

In Turkish territory the Bibleman's work

was arduous enough ; in the Persian cities the fiery bigotry of the Moslems multiplied its risks. Mullah, Sayid (descendant of the Prophet), and Sheikh, however, found it useless to bluster with Benjamin Badal. In Ispahan he was taken, by order of the Sheikh, before the magistrate—and sold a Gospel as he passed through the crowd. The magistrate forbade him to sell, and dismissed him ; and Benjamin resumed his work. Again he was conveyed to the Sheikh, who again delivered him to the magistrate ; and the magistrate detained him until the Prince had considered the matter. The Prince decided that he might sell his books where he liked, except in the *bazars* of Ispahan. 'Very well, your honour,' said Benjamin ; 'I am going away now on a journey for two months ; but, please God, I will return and sell my books here once more.'

At Yezd he was well received by friendly Jews and Fire-worshippers ; at Shiraz he quickly sold a good number of copies ; at Nehavend he was decoyed by the High Priest and savagely bastinadoed. The Governor could only sympathise with him, as he could take no action against the Great Mullah. Benjamin was not to be disheartened. 'When

I think,' he wrote, 'of those who will come after me and be able to sell the Scriptures freely, I feel very glad and comforted for this suffering for Christ's sake. The same day I was able, by God's grace and help, to sell eight copies in that benighted town.'

The work was not confined to Persia, but extended through a Turkish region full of Biblical and historical associations. There was Hillah in the south amid the *tells* and heaps that once were Babylon; and in the north Mosul, from which one looked eastward across the Tigris to the mounds of Nineveh. At Kerkuk Benjamin met Mullah Yakub the Jew, who said to him, 'You are bold to speak as you speak to the Mohammedans; if we did so they would slay us.' 'And were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego fearful?' Benjamin asked. 'In those times it was different,' replied the Jew. 'Has the arm of the Lord then been straitened; or has God grown old?' 'God forbid,' said the Jew; 'but our faith has grown less.'

About the end of 1885 the colporteurs visited Kerbela for the first time, and they carried their lives in their hands. With great caution they sold three copies of Scripture in three days among the hundreds of pilgrims wailing

at the Shi'ah shrine for Hosein, 'the Martyr of Islam.' Seven years later the Scriptures were sold openly in the *bazars*, and the colporteurs, received by the Sheikh and an assembly of learned Sayids, 'discoursed on the divinity and the manhood of Christ and on the work of the Holy Trinity.'

What with its intense heat in summer and its bitter cold in winter, its roads infested with robbers, and its city crowds ever ready to break into violence, Persia beyond most Bible Agencies tested the faith, courage, and endurance of its Biblemen.

After the assassination of the Shah, Nasr-ed-Deen, in 1896 the whole country was for many months in a turmoil. During a Moslem disturbance at Julfa a stone flung at Benjamin struck a Mohammedan on the head, and a fortnight later the man died from natural causes. The Christian colporteur was at once charged with killing him, and an Ispahan mob prepared to carry the corpse to Julfa and attack the Christians. To prevent further mischief, Benjamin surrendered to the authorities. For seventeen days he was kept chained, neck and hand, but the Prince would not give him over to the Mullahs. On the protest of the British Consul his chains were

struck off, and he was sent under guard over the snowy mountains for trial at Teheran. Two months later our Chargé-d'Affaires obtained his release on condition that he should not return to Ispahan. Finally that restriction was removed by a *firman* obtained by our Ambassador.

So violent, however, had the Mullahs now become that the Government forbade colportage and all distribution of the Scriptures to Mohammedans. Yet, strange as it seems, at Kerbela a Moslem schoolmaster bought Arabic and Turkish portions for his scholars ; the Governor of Jasson, in spite of the appeal of his council, bought a Bible ; and at Shahraban the Chief Mullah himself opposed the authorities, and of thirty-one volumes sold with his approval five were purchased by the Governor. That year (1898) the harvest failed, famine set in, and was scarcely abated in the next. On one of Benjamin's journeys his horse died, and though the villagers were glad to feast on it, they were eager to give whatever else they could in exchange for his books. Strangest fact of all, the Biblemen began to find themselves welcomed, and people who had abused and stoned them pressed them now to stay.

From the formation of the Agency down to the Centenary of the Society over 155,000 copies of Scripture had been sold, and the first depositary and the first colporteur had seen a Gospel bought by a Moslem rhapsodist in order that he might recite to the people the story of Jesus in the holy month of Moharram.

After an absence of five and twenty years Benjamin visited Urumiah, west of the Caspian, in 1910. Here he was born of a Syrian family, ten years after the coming of the American missionaries in 1835. 'God,' he said, 'had done much through them. The Christians of this place were more advanced than those of other places in Persia, especially in recent years.' In 1912 he was travelling with a young assistant along the southern shores of the Caspian, making fair sales at Resht, Balfrush, and Astrabad, and telling the good news of salvation, especially to the Baha-is—a Moslem sect, followers of The Baha, 'The Coming One,' who believed in the Scriptures but held that there were 'many incarnations, many suffering Messiahs.' They had been preceded by, and probably sprang from, the Bâb-is, followers of The Bâb, 'The Gate' to the True Way, who based their faith on the words of our Lord as to His second advent.

'As soon as the War began in Europe,' Benjamin wrote at the end of 1916, 'dangerous conditions arose in the East, and especially in Persia. Within the last two years I have been twice attacked by robbers, and the last time I was so badly beaten that I just escaped with my life.' This 'last time' occurred in the summer of 1916. Benjamin, now an old man of seventy-one, had set out with his assistant from Julfa into the eastern country, equipped for a twelve-months' tour. They had with them two camels loaded with Scriptures, and had made five or six stages when the drivers stopped to water the camels at a reservoir in a reedy hollow in the desert. They were seen by robbers lurking in the sandhills, and were at once attacked. One of the drivers hid himself among the high reeds; the rest of the party were brutally beaten and stripped of almost all clothing. For nearly two days and a night they were driven barefoot about sixty miles over the rugged hills. At a spot where there were three or four huts the robbers divided their plunder and rode off.

The colporteurs and their camel-driver praised God for their deliverance, and set out for their destination, the town of Najin. At

sundown they tried to appease their hunger on the fruit of some mulberry trees, and slept under the stars. Next morning they gathered more mulberries, and trudged over the stony ground until they reached a village where the peasants had compassion on them, fed them, and provided them with donkeys for the journey.

At Najin friendly people supplied them with clothing and money, and Benjamin returned to Julfa with three of his six cases of Scriptures restored to him. The robbers had opened the cases and helped themselves to a few copies. The camel-driver who had escaped among the reeds had reported the outrage to the Governor of Najin, and fifty gendarmes who were sent to the spot carried off some five hundred volumes, valued at £75, which they sold in the *bazar* for what they could get. For this official pillage no indemnity was allowed.

The horrors of famine and pestilence followed in the wake of the Great War, and in 1918 hundreds of thousands died from starvation, cholera, and typhus. In 1919 the Bible Society lost, after forty years of service, 'two of its best men in Persia'—Mr. George Mackertich, its first depositary, who died in January,

and its first colporteur, Benjamin Badal, who passed away in September.

In the beautiful city of Rio de Janeiro in 1909 there was Joaquim da Silva, too old now for regular work after thirty years of service, but eager to be afoot whenever he could. In times gone by he was one of the very few pioneers who laboured in the State of São Paulo, in that of Matto Grosso, and along the forest-ways of the Amazon. Three years later he was still most anxious to work a little—was 'happier when selling than when sitting in the house.' In 1913, in his eighty-second year, he died suddenly of heart-failure: 'a godly man, one of our bravest.'

In Serbia Wilhelm Lichtenberger began colportage about the age of twenty-two. He had lost both mother and father when he was scarcely eight years old, and there were five brothers of them and one sister left orphans. Before he was nine he was earning his own keep on a farm. At school he had learned little from a brutal master, but in the farmhouse, where he lived, he discovered in a box a Bible, old and without covers, which had belonged to his parents. 'I found a deep love springing up in my heart,' he said, 'for the old farmhouse with its peace and its

godly order, and for the happy family circle with its morning and evening prayers. When Christ came into my heart, I was anxious to tell others about Him. I began to buy little stocks of Testaments, and to go from house to house after my day's work was done.' One of his boyish day-dreams was to be a muleteer travelling over the Balkan ranges with the Word of God.

It was while training for missionary service at St. Chrishona, near Basel, that he accepted an engagement with the Bible Society. Within a few years there was not a Serbian town or village unknown to him. When he was well over sixty years of age he might have been seen with his colleagues manœuvring his horse and cart along the icy tracks and deep snow of the hills. After this risky adventure (well repaid by the welcome of the villagers, who bought gladly), a week or two was spent upon the Turkish frontier until snowdrifts and a rapid thaw compelled a retreat. Even then they were made happy by the sale of a Bible to a village priest for use in the church.

About 1910 he was appointed depositary at Belgrade, where he was succeeded by one of his sons, Johann, who had made several

journeys with him. On the sunset side of seventy he looked to a tranquil old age, when the Great War broke out. Once more he shouldered the Bibleman's pack, and worked bravely till September 1918, when he fell ill. The next year, however, he was again afoot, despite the loss of one of his sons. The end came in March 1922, and among almost his last words he said, 'I have striven to be faithful. God will send you better men. He takes His workers, but the work goes on. Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life.' He was seventy-eight years old, and for fifty-six he had realised the day-dreams of his boyhood.

In 1910 Colporteur Woschitz retired after thirty-seven of his seventy years spent in arduous service at the port of Trieste and in the north-eastern corner of the shore of the Adriatic—'one of the stoniest fields; but never losing heart, and in his old age looking forward to a harvest of his sowing.'

Jacob Hehn, whose first Bible journey in Rumania took place in 1874, was depositary at Bucharest during the Great War, and distributed Rumanian Gospels free of charge to the sick and wounded soldiers in hospital, and copies in Russian to Russian prisoners in

German camps. He passed away in the summer of 1920 after forty-six years' service.

For a moment in 1921 we come upon Moengsa in the great tropical island of Java. He had served three and thirty years, and people who had bought from him ten or a dozen years gone by had become Christians through reading the Scriptures.

In the summer of 1923, after he had spent more than thirty years in the seaport and the dreary nitrate pampas of Iquique, Chile, Colporteur Orellana's health began to fail, and by the end of the year he had to resign his post.

In 1924 the Society lost in Stephanos Maqar the oldest Bibleman in the Egyptian Agency. At one time a Coptic priest, he offered his services in 1887. After nine years of excellent work he resigned, but could find no rest for his spirit until he returned some months later. In his travels he ranged from Jaffa in Palestine to Somaliland south of the entrance to the Red Sea, and could we follow him, we should find him a most enterprising and interesting figure. He opened depots at Khartum and Wad Medani, a hundred and thirty miles up the Blue Nile ; went with a desert caravan to Kassala ; journeyed with camel and asses

through thorny wastes, parched tracts, strange settlements to Gedaref ; and at length through forests overrun with wild beasts to the Abyssinian border and the grass huts among lemon and cotton trees of the old Pilgrim Mission of Gallabat.

On one of these tours a characteristic incident occurred with an Arab to whom he offered the Scriptures. Thinking to test this man of the Christian books, 'That is four piastres,' said the wily Moslem, giving him an old gold coin. 'Not so,' replied the Bible-man, 'that coin is worth a hundred piastres.' 'Truly,' said the Arab, well pleased, 'thou art a truthful man, and thy religion is real.' He asked him to his house : other old coins were shown and valued, and the Arab offered Maqar a dollar for his trouble. 'Nay,' said Stephanos, 'I cannot take the money. It would be better for you to buy a Bible.' 'Then take the dollar for it.' But Stephanos refused to take more than the price of the book. This pleased the Arab more than ever. 'This day,' he said, 'thou shalt abide with me in the house.' 'That,' replied Stephanos, 'I will accept.'

It was in the same year, 1924, that the Spanish Agency parted with another veteran,

who retired after thirty-three years of faithful service. The Bible first came into his hands in 1873; within three months he had read the whole of it, and the light of a new life shone over the long way before him. 'If,' he said at the close, 'the gift of youth were granted to me again, I should dedicate it once more to colportage, the most effectual way of reaching the people with the Gospel.'

The young grow old, and 'the grasshopper is a burden'; 'God takes His workers; but the work goes on.'

CHAPTER XI

THE MERCHANT ADVENTURERS: I

THERE are pages in the Reports of the Bible Society which recall the intrepid spirit of the great Sea-Captains and the Merchant Adventurers of long ago. Of all such men of courage and endurance, the world makes least account of the latest.

Open the atlas at the map of the Far East. Over a hundred miles north-west of Peking you will reach Kalgan, the Tatar 'Gate' opening into the vast regions beyond the Great Wall of China. Mongolia sweeps out before you, covering an expanse considerably larger than six times the area of France. Some two and a half million people are scattered over the wastes of sand and shingle and the grassy plains among its mountains. In Urga, far away on the Government road between Peking and Lake Baikal, in Uliassutai farther west, and in the smaller towns among the hills, the inhabitants are chiefly Chinese traders; the rest of the population are Mongol

nomads, housing for months in tent-villages and then moving on to fresh pastures with their camels, ponies, and sheep.

In 1893 the Rev. Franz August Larson, then quite a young Swedish minister, entered Mongolia in the service of the Scandinavian Mission, whose stations had been fixed at Urga and Uliassutai. After eight years of work the Mission was swept away in 1900 by the Boxer rising. Most of his colleagues lost their lives, but Larson and his wife escaped with other missionaries to Siberia. In 1902, on meeting with the late Dr. G. H. Bondfield at Tientsin, he was appointed to the Society's newly formed Sub-agency of Mongolia and the Chinese border, with headquarters at Kalgan. His first assistant was Boijinto, a Christian Mongol, who had been cook and ox-driver to the devoted L.M.S. missionary, James Gilmour; and so began the great adventure which lasted for seven years.

No one goes on foot in Mongolia, except pilgrims who trudge from shrine to shrine to 'acquire merit.' Larson's travelling equipment was a caravan of four to six camels, as many ponies, two Mongol drivers, at times a Chinese cook, and a Mongol assistant. The distances were great, the tours extended

over months; large supplies of Scripture and food for the whole journey had to be taken. Nothing could be bought in Mongolia but milk, cheese, and occasionally a live sheep, but there was a welcome addition to the larder when an antelope from the great herds on the plains fell to the Bibleman's rifle—and a rifle was needed against the huge wolves which howled round his tents at night.

Ever farther and farther westward they 'trekked' with Chinese, Tibetan, and Mongol Scriptures, which they bartered—the only money being bits of uncoined silver—for sour milk, cheese, scarves, ribbons, lambskins, and fuel. They found purchasers at the stations along the Government roads to Urga and Uliassutai. At the temples the yellow-robed priests (*lamas*) listened curiously and were ready to buy books. In the country round Urga they sold better than in the capital itself; but they were most successful in the southern districts, where the population was larger and there were more school-children. Nearly one-third of the population were clerics, and all the clerics (*lamas*) could read, yet there was much indifference to religion among the people; and even those who told their beads and read their Buddhist prayers in Tibetan

seemed often to know little about their faith. Still, Gospels and New Testaments were finding their way into tents, houses, monasteries, and schools. In schools, indeed, the Mongolian Gospels were the only available printed books.

It was often a hard life in these journeys of two to three thousand miles. Blizzards of sand and snow raging for a fortnight ; severe frost-bite ; mishaps by the way—the assistant robbed of horse, saddle, and everything ; the other horse bought for him devoured by wolves ; the assistant lost on the mountain at night without fire or shelter, were among their troubles. But among their happy surprises were the recovery of a number of Scriptures supposed to have been destroyed by the Boxers ; traces of earlier distribution ; and meetings with many Mongols who had known James Gilmour.

Larson was handier with the rifle than with the pen, but he has left glimpses of native religious ceremonies. During a winter trip he lived for a time with a Mongol family, and saw the manner of their fire-worship. A large *argol* fire was kindled ; across the open stove were laid four sticks, on which were laid the breast of a sheep and the inside fat, both

dipped in oil and whisky. Around the bright blaze the people gathered and read prayers for blessing and prosperity in the New Year. Another rite which he noted was the worship of heaven. Very early in the morning, by the light of a large fire of wood and oil out of doors, the people cast themselves down and knocked their heads on the ground towards each of the four points of the compass.

During these journeys Mrs. Larson was in charge of the depot at Kalgan, and a number of colporteurs were at work in connection with the Missions in the large tracts of Chihli and Shansi outside the Great Wall. Arrangements were now made for the Rev. C. G. Söderbom of the Scandinavian Alliance to take charge of the general business of the Sub-agency, and early in June 1907 Mr. Larson set out on a two-years' journey through Mongolia.

With six camels, four horses, two camelmen, a cook, a Chinese colporteur, and 8000 copies of Scripture, chiefly in Mongol and Tibetan, he took the Western Route, fared none the worse for the summer heat of the Desert of Gobi, and reached Urga at the close of July. Though this road was new to him, his sales were good ; 'even in places never

visited before the people knew us, and when we arrived in Urga the Mongols said, "The bookseller is putting up his tent again."'

For nearly two months they travelled due west, up and down numberless hills, across rivers, over stones and sand, and though it was still August they were harassed with cold, rain, and snow. Still there were upliftings of the heart. Mongols often came to his tent—which had seldom happened before. A rich man who had heard of the strangers, and who feared that he might be too late, came from a great distance through heavy rain for a New Testament. 'I too had been hindered,' wrote Larson, 'providentially it would seem, by the heavy rain.' Two boys ran five miles to overtake him, and to buy some of the Gospels. Two Russians—and he found the Russians ever helpful and kind—paid ready money for books which they intended for their Mongol friends.

Eight miles from Uliassutai the caravan was blocked on the top of a mountain pass for two whole days by a snowstorm. On September 28 Mr. Larson was writing from the town: 'Our journey was most interesting and successful. I have already sold 6000 books.' It had been his plan to get to Kobdo,

some two hundred miles farther west, and then, swinging into the north, to spend the summer months among the nomads with their flocks and herds in the green river-valleys, but his very success compelled him to return to Urga for a fresh supply of Scriptures.

Through the kindness of the Russian Consul and the Chinese Governor he left by the Government post-road at the end of January 1908, and by changing horses at every station he completed his long journey through the snow in fourteen days. It was bitterly cold ; washing was too dangerous a luxury, and at night he slept in his clothes between heavy woollen felts.

In Urga he obtained quarters in the store of a Russian merchant, and was able to sell a number of books to Tibetans, Buriats from Russia and from China, Lamas of the city, and people from the country round. The magistrate of the principal court, to whom he presented the New Testament, was seen to be reading it in the intervals between his cases, and afterwards visited Mr. Larson twice.

'Oh, such a winter!' wrote our traveller in the middle of March. 'We have had several blizzards, and to-day we have another snowstorm. Animals, and even people, are

dying from cold.' On April 23 there were signs of a change : ' More snow to-day, and the mountains are very white. The ice on the River Tola is still strong enough for carriages to cross ; yet the spring birds have come ! ' And Larson's thoughts turned to a region which it appeared that no missionary had ever entered.

In the north-west, between the Orkhon and Selenga rivers, and reaching to the Russian border, lay the territory of the Hanta Ching Wong, whose Mongol subjects alone were permitted to farm and till the land. Romance could scarcely have created a more astonishing personage in Mongolia than this prince. A mighty hunter, spending most of his time in the mountain forests, his wealth had furnished him with big Russian horses, American carriages, guns of all kinds, and costly foreign hounds. He received Mr. Larson kindly ; and after more than a thousand Gospels had been disposed of, the Hanta Ching Wong conveyed him back to Urga in one of the luxurious carriages—' the most comfortable journey I ever made in Mongolia.' For a few weeks, when the weather was extremely hot and wet, Larson remained near the capital, and then, itinerating through the south-east

country, he arrived at Kalgan at the close of September.

He and the Hanta Ching Wong met afterwards in Peking. Although this friendly Khan showed no signs of religious change, he listened attentively to Mr. Larson's exposition of Christian truth, and New Testaments and Gospels were presented to the chief men in the Dalai Lama's suite. So closely, however, did the Chinese authorities guard the Dalai Lama himself that even the Prince failed to obtain Mr. Larson an interview. At Shanghai—and this was the Prince's first view of the sea and of Western civilisation—the Hanta Ching Wong, who also made the Bible House his headquarters, was so keenly interested in the range of the Society's work and in its Manchu and Mongol versions, that he urged for an appeal to King Edward for missionaries to come and translate religious and other books for his people.

This long Mongolian 'trek' occupied sixteen months, and 21 New Testaments and over 12,300 Gospels were placed in the hands of a people much less accessible than those of the southern Mongolian provinces. The total circulation in the seven years exceeded 188,000 copies of Scripture, and the distribution of

the Mongol version had grown in the last four years from 2612 to 6558 copies.

Probably no European traveller, and certainly no missionary, had ever seen more of these western regions than this evangelist. A special providence seemed to safeguard him in his wayfaring. He never met with hostility. Once a Russian caravan loaded with silver and pursued by robbers left the road and placed their precious boxes in his tent for protection. The freebooters with their wives and children, their tents and horses, were themselves a formidable caravan of nearly two hundred souls. Larson went out to them, rebuked them, and ordered them away. They obeyed ; and late that night the silver caravan was sent off with a special guide by a route which took the Russians safely to their destination.

It was now fifteen years since Mr. Larson had entered this wild East, and late in the autumn of 1908 he and his wife left for home on furlough ; but Mongolia had still adventurous years in store for him.

CHAPTER XII

THE MERCHANT ADVENTURERS: II

WHILE Mr. Larson was enduring burning heat or blizzards of snow and sand, another merchant adventurer was preparing for a similar expedition into the wild regions south and west of Mongolia.

Mr. Hans Döring was sub-agent for the province of Kansu. A prompt, versatile, and courageous man, he had frequently acted as *locum tenens* in other provinces, but he was now called to a vaster field. In 1878 the China Inland Mission had entered Kansu; about ten years later Mr. George Parker had made an incursion, preaching and selling the Scriptures, into the Sinkiang, 'the New Dominion,' which spreads northward into the Desert of Gobi, and stretches westward along Tibet and Kashmir to the borders of Asiatic Russia. But success had been slow in coming to the missionaries in these remote places, and in 1904, when a circulation of 1647 copies of Scripture was hailed as a sign of progress,

there were not quite fourscore communicants among the nine millions of people in Kansu.

In 1905, after the Rev. George W. Hunter had taken some experimental trips in the New Dominion, it was arranged that Mr. Döring should join him in a journey which in the course of a year or more might enable them to visit Kuldja, or even Kashgar, some thirteen hundred miles away. In February 1906, therefore, Döring set out with 15,000 copies of Scripture in various tongues, but on arriving at Liangchau he learned that Mr. Hunter had already started. Untroubled by the strangeness of the country, he at once pressed forward with a caravan of twenty camels, a pony for himself, and a donkey for his Chinese helper.

Twenty days' march, distressed by sleeplessness and blinding dust-storms in the Desert of Gobi, took him to Hami, where he had an interview with the tributary king. Crossing the Tienshan Mountains, he was snow-bound for two days in the small town of Muliho. Here he was invited to visit a Chinese cloth-dyer named Wang.

There was a time when Wang lived hundreds of leagues nearer the sunrise, and heard much of 'the doctrine' from English mis-

sionaries who passed that way ; but in those days he had paid little heed to their teaching. Then a curious series of changes and incidents took him from his old surroundings to this small town beyond the great desert.

Wang's home in Muliho was a single room opening on the wintry main street. The *k'ang* (a Chinese bed) was the only seat, and Mr. Döring was welcomed to it on entering. Wang then took down a book hanging by a string from a nail in the wall, and handed it to his visitor. It was a copy in Mandarin Chinese of the Acts of the Apostles, stained like the wall to a dark grey by the smoke of the small mud hearth near the bed. The fingered pages and the torn leaves carefully patched showed that it had been in constant use.

Seven years had gone by since the book was given to Wang by a travelling Chinese merchant, who had received it from some missionary but had not cared to read it. In that far-away place it was to Wang a link between himself and his old home, and the influence of it, as he read and pondered over it during those years, so wrought upon him that his removal from among his own people seemed almost a divine preparation.

The small smoke-stained volume which had revealed Christ to him was given the same conspicuous position in his home as the Chinese neighbours gave their idols. Beside it were two sheets of paper, one inscribed with what he remembered of the Commandments, the other with as much of the Lord's Prayer as he was able to recall. Mr. Döring gladly corrected and completed both sheets, and Wang very thankfully bought New Testaments for himself and his assistants.

Towards the end of April Döring arrived at Urumtsi, the capital of Chinese Turkistan, and for a short time he and Mr. Hunter worked together among the strangely mixed population—emigrants (voluntary and involuntary) from China, Turkomans, Mongols, Tibetans, and Hassars. But the farther west was still magnetic, and at the beginning of September he was at Kuldja, not many miles from the Russian frontier, among people from all the tribes of Central Asia. At the end of autumn he returned to Urumtsi, and there he was snow-bound from mid-November until the end of the year.

The risks and hardships of this venture were well repaid by a wide dispersion of the Word of God—6721 copies: 8 Bibles, 130

Testaments, 4402 Portions sold by Mr. Döring ; 64 Testaments and 2117 Portions by Mr. Hunter—in Mandarin, Wênli, Russian, Kalmuk, Kirghiz, and Arabic.

As soon as weather permitted he returned to Kansu through Turfan and Hami, and about the end of February 1907 he was once more at Liangchau after twelve months' absence. The evangelist within him gave him little rest, and on March 9 he was on the route to the desert with a fresh supply of books and glad anticipation of summer weeks in Russian Turkistan.

On April 30 he was welcomed at the caravansary. The innkeeper made him his guest and gave him his best room, on the clean walls of which hung scrolls in unknown Persian characters, and on the mantelpiece lay the Koran, a sealed book to the good man except for what he had heard the Mullah tell. This handsome middle-aged Moslem, Mr. Ma, had lost father, mother, brothers, and sisters during a rebellion in Shensi. He alone had escaped, and in this new country Allah had been merciful to him.

Döring felt that his host was being 'prepared by God to receive the light of the Gospel.' The man listened closely to Christian truth.

He knew from the Koran, he said, that Jesus rose from the dead, ascended into the heavens, and would appear again when all the people of the earth had become Moslems. He confessed, too, that Christianity was a better faith than his own—it proclaimed the love of God. Asked how it was that, while the native Turkoman wrapped his head in a white shawl when he worshipped, and the Mohammedan wore all day a white linen cap as a token of continual worship, he himself wore the usual Chinese black cap, Mr. Ma replied simply, 'I worship Allah with my heart, not with my head.'

At Muliho, once more, on May 10, Wang the cloth-dyer came to see the bookseller. He brought with him two others who had been led to Christ through reading the New Testament. They were now eager to have Bibles, and in the course of a long conversation Mr. Döring besought them to pray daily for light and guidance from God in that remote spot.

Passing through Urumtsi late in May, Döring pushed on in spite of snowstorm and swamp, offering his books in the small hamlets, and failing to sell a copy where he had sold five hundred on his previous visits; crossed the table-land of Dzungaria; and had almost

reached Zugatschak when he was attacked by marauders, struck down from his horse with a club, and robbed of all the money in his knapsack. He entered Russian territory at the end of June, and in July arrived at Semipalatinsk, where he learned that colporteurs of the Russian Agency had been there before him. Descending the River Irtish by steamer to Omsk, he took the eastward Trans-Siberian trains, reached Shanghai in the last days of July, and proceeded to take charge of the Kwangtung Sub-agency in August.

A versatile, ever-ready, untiring man! During those months in Chinese Turkistan there must have been many places in which he was the first preacher of the Gospel; and in the thousands of books he left among tribesmen and immigrants in their native speech he scattered seed that in God's chosen time was to yield a great harvest.

He left Kwangtung in 1911 for the Sub-agency of Tientsin. At the close of the following year he passed to that of Shantung, and during the revolutionary troubles in 1914 his wife and children were for some months in imminent danger. During the siege of Tsingtau shells and shrapnel fell on all sides of them, but they escaped unhurt, and the

depot in a neighbouring street sustained but little damage.

In 1917 (a year in which the circulation of the Scriptures in Shantung—437,000 copies, and all of them but 6500 sales by colporteurs—was the largest in the Chinese Sub-agencies) he set out on a winter journey to the pioneer mission stations in the north-west of the province. We have glimpses of him and his 'two weather-beaten wheelbarrow coolies' with the books and baggage marching through a frozen country for fifty miles against an Arctic head-wind. At Yuncheng he stops to cheer a lonely young Chinese evangelist ; and on Sunday helps with his violin to keep the untrained congregation in tune. The strong sun has thawed the ice in the Yellow River, but it still bears, and he and his coolies wade across ankle-deep through the benumbing slush. At one hamlet where they pass the night the people crowd round and stare—they have seen Japanese traders on their remote road, but never yet a blue-eyed foreigner. The inn, which has neither doors nor windows, reminds Döring of the mud dens between Hami and Turfan. On the way to the farthest mission station a brief spell of warm sunshine is followed in the Hwang-ho desert by a blind-

ing dust-storm and piercing cold which cuts through fur coat and camel-hair rug.

For the return journey a Chinese driver agrees to convey him in his mule-cart, but they must start by moonlight, about two o'clock each morning. A trying tour this circuit of three hundred and thirty miles, but our traveller has found promising fields for wider colportage, and seen much else to lift up his heart.

Those years of Chinese work were now drawing to an end. In 1919 Mr. Döring was in Germany holding meetings among the soldiers and distributing the Society's free grant of New Testaments, for the most part among very thankful men. As superintendent in Vienna in 1923 he met with much encouragement in an extensive tour, and it was decided to resume colportage in Austria.

In the vast expanses of Brazil there were regions of adventure as perilous in their way as the wilds of Mongolia or Chinese Turkistan. Away from the railway and the visible strong arm of the law, little account was made of a man's life among the hot-blooded and fanatical people of Minas Geraes.

In 1911 Mr Chaplin, the Society's sub-

agent in Brazil, and Colporteur Camillo set out with a guide on a tour through the eastern side of the province. They visited twenty-six towns and villages, in which they held public services, sold over a thousand copies of Scripture, and gave away Gospels among the very poor—not without scenes of violence and hairbreadth escapes.

At Gramma he and Camillo divided the town between them. At a store near the church Mr. Chaplin met a lawyer, and had a little conversation within hearing of a group of people. On leaving the store he was followed by a number of boys whose shouts of '*Protestante, Protestante*' made it impossible for him to offer his books. Suddenly the boys vanished; and as the sun was now setting he turned to go back to his quarters. He was again approaching the store, when the boys all at once reappeared, yelling and pelting him with stones and dirt, and a number of men joined them.

Seeing the lawyer talking to a priest beside the store, he advanced towards them, saluted his reverence, and presented one of his books. The priest took it and tore it into shreds. 'These books,' he cried, 'are Protestant. Be off with you out of this place.' There was

another volley of stones ; some of the crowd began to hustle him, and others to strike him. ' No striking, no striking ! ' the lawyer called out ; ' let him come into the store.'

But the rush of the crowd had already carried him past the entrance, and suddenly a large stone struck him behind the ear. He was still dizzy with the shock when a coloured man leaped forward, kicked him savagely, and clutched his bag of books. ' The *padre* says we must have these,' he shouted. The crowd closed in, and in the struggle that followed Chaplin realised that his one chance of getting clear was to abandon the books. He broke his way through and raced towards his quarters, pursued by a howling mob who threatened to use their knives and pistols.

In the deepening dusk he took a wrong turning, and found that he was going back into the town. Escape now seemed hopeless, and secreting his money about him as best he might, he turned to face the rabble. Two men seized him as their prisoner, and so prevented further violence.

In front of the church, to which he was led, a big fire was burning, and, as he learned afterwards, his books were in the flames. The

priest was standing by, and one of the men, releasing the prisoner's arm, addressed the *padre*: 'We have brought this Protestant prisoner to you, our priest; we are ready to obey your orders, whatever they may be, even to shooting him.' The mob broke into wild *Vivas!* 'Long live the Catholic religion!'

'Are you the priest?' Chaplin asked.

'Yes,' was the answer, 'I am.'

'And do you call yourself a follower of Christ, who bade us to love one another, that you treat me in this way? I am English, and represent the British and Foreign Bible Society, whose object it is to circulate the Word of God which you profess to believe. I am entitled to the religious liberty guaranteed by the Brazilian Constitution.'

'I know all about your Society,' replied the priest; 'and our religion is far above the authority of any government.'

The attitude of the priest, however, had changed. In the light of the fire he had seen the blood trickling down Chaplin's neck and coat. Violence had gone far enough, and he was evidently afraid of the consequences. If the Society's agent would leave at once, he promised that he should be no further molested. Chaplin, however, claimed his books, and

declared that he must stay the night. 'The books you cannot have,' said the priest, 'but I will agree that you stay till the early morning.

He ordered the people to escort him to his quarters and to see that he was not hurt, but the most lawless of the crowd were so eager to do away with the Protestant that the priest thought it prudent to accompany them.

They had not gone far before the guide, uneasy at Mr. Chaplin's absence, was seen hurrying towards them. He was at once attacked, flung to the ground, and brutally kicked. Still held by the two men, Chaplin, who could not help him, appealed to the priest to interpose: 'He is a Brazilian and my companion.' 'Never mind him,' replied the priest. 'You are safe; they may do what they like with him.'

Happily, however, the guide got clear. The priest departed, taking most of the mob with him and leaving the two men to guard their prisoner to his quarters. There he learned that Camillo too had been stoned, but not seriously hurt. 'The guide,' wrote Chaplin afterwards, 'behaved splendidly. He did not resist, he made no reply to anything that was said to him, though he was nearly strangled. When he spoke of the attack afterwards, "I

felt," he said, " that the Lord Jesus was close by my side." '

They were assailed elsewhere in the same fanatical spirit. At an open-air meeting at St. João the chief of police, revolver in hand, stood beside them to protect them from violence. At some of the farms farther on the people refused even to look at their books, and from one place they were driven out before the knives and scythes of a mob who bade them begone 'before we treat you as they did at Gramma.'

An undreamed-of surprise cheered them on their way. A Roman Catholic farmer welcomed them to his house near St. Margarida. He had built a small church in the village, but had been badly treated by the priest. On the Sunday he invited a score of his friends, and a meeting was held under his own roof. 'Ah,' he said, 'if we only had our church filled with the kind of people you tell us about!' 'He was very sad at our departure,' wrote Mr. Chaplin, 'and when we said "good-bye," his eyes were filled with tears.'

The work met with a still more unexpected encouragement in Rio de Janeiro itself.

The pulpits had been ringing with denunciations of the Bible as an immoral book, of the agents who circulated it as immoral men

who believed neither in God nor in Jesus Christ, in heaven nor in hell, nor yet in the need of leading a good life. In September that year (1911) the *Rio Morning Post* published two long articles on the Bible as a book which people were urged to read, which if they began to study it they could never cast aside. Lamartine, Walter Scott, Huxley, Max Müller, and Chateaubriand were quoted in testimony of the value of the Book of Books. The articles were admirably written, and bore the signature of a priest in Rio, one of the most respected and most highly educated of the Roman Catholic clergy.

In Burma, eight years later, the country villages were scarcely less hostile than the small towns and farms of Minas Geraes. The people dreaded the adventurers as emissaries sent out with germs of disease to reduce the population.

The dusk had fallen when a colporteur in Upper Burma reached a village enclosed in a strong fence of thorn. At the sight of him the watchman, flinging the gate to, cried out, 'No coming into this village after the sky has closed—no, not if you were the Governor-General himself. Camp out in the fields, you with your plague-spreading books; that is good enough for such as you.'

At another village the head-man forbade any one to supply the colporteurs with firewood, rice, or water. They could not put a foot in the place lest they should spread pestilence. The night was spent in the open, and it was not until the following afternoon that they arrived at a village where they could buy food.

The villagers in another quarter sent out men armed with *dahs* (short swords) and pitchforks to keep guard over the strangers till daylight enabled them to go on their way.

In the Prome district a Bibleman had his house burnt over his head. He and his family escaped, but they had lost everything. In another village a colporteur was stoned as he passed along the street; and in a third a Chinaman who had been recently baptized was similarly maltreated.

Yet these trials and dangers proved to be blessings in disguise. 'When I first visited this village two years ago,' wrote Shwe Thwe, 'I was driven out of it with hard words and curses. Now I have many friends here, and my books are freely bought.'

And in no previous year were so many instances of conversion and baptism reported as the direct result of Bible work.

CHAPTER XIII

WISE AND WITTY

GIVING an account of his work as a colporteur among the immigrants who landed at St. John, New Brunswick, in 1923, 'I have had fifty-two religious conversations,' wrote the Rev. Dr. Heine, 'conducted in fifteen languages.'

The words bring to mind so many linguistic Biblemen who once laboured, or still labour, especially in the emigrant seaports of the world, that it almost seems as though something of the ancient gift of tongues still survives among the messengers of the Gospel. Even among those who speak but their native language one is often half conscious of guidance which prompts the fitting phrase.

What they say is full of surprises—quickness of thought, flashes of wit, infinite tact, good-humour and resourcefulness, words of gentle courtesy, of compassionate helpfulness, and a wonderful familiarity with the text of the Scriptures. Seldom, if ever, is one of the Bibleman's little books offered for sale without

some uncommon talk, some phrase to awaken interest, some device to draw attention.

It is election time in France. Lively groups in the square at Alais are discussing the prospects of the candidates. The colporteur listens; he too has a vote as a citizen of no mean city.

'There is one candidate,' he says in a lull of the talk, 'whom none of you have mentioned, and He is the best of all.'

'Who can that be?' they ask.

Saix extends his arm towards the thorn-crowned Figure on the market-cross. 'He is there,' he says; and holding up a Gospel: 'This is His programme—*God so loved the world.*'

'Good, good! Quite right!' many voices answer; and the people begin to buy the Scriptures.

At Le Puy, in Haute Loire, Chauvet is noisily interrupted by a number of Socialists. He points quietly to the gilded letters on the front of the town hall: *Liberté, Egalite, Fraternité.*

'Those words,' he says, 'are written for you, *messieurs*, and for all of us men.'

And three of the roughest of his opponents pay for Testaments.

Nothing surprises people more than the care

and labour the Bibleman spends for a result which seems to them very small. A Parisian workman is bantering the colporteur on his easy way of making a living. '*Allons donc!*' exclaims his wife, 'wouldst thou be ready to tramp all day long as he does and to explain the reason as patiently as he has done, and all to sell a book for a *sou*?'

'Not much,' laughs the man.

'No, not much!' rejoins his wife, as she pays for a Gospel.

Far away on the Blue Nile an old Sheikh takes the same view of the matter. 'I am sorry for thee,' he says, 'that thou shouldst offer thy book at so low a price.'

Stephanos Maqar talks to him of the object of the Bible Society; and the Sheikh, who thinks such good work ought to be taken in hand by the Sultan, does his 'little bit' by buying a Bible for himself and half a dozen Gospels for distribution.

Sometimes people think that they should have the Scriptures for nothing, but the Bibleman explains the situation with a tact which cannot be resisted. 'I thank thee,' says an Arab chief after reading the Pentateuch for a long time, 'I thank thee much for this book.' 'And may Heaven,' replies the colporteur,

'also reward thee for paying me the price of it.' Whereupon the Arab smiles and hands him the money.

Yusuf Kub fares both worse and better in Mesopotamia.

'O pig!' cries a Moslem schoolmaster, when he is told the price of the book he is reading. 'Wilt thou steal from the Society which gives these books without price?'

Yusuf explains to him that he is mistaken.

'Then,' says the Moslem, 'dost thou love Christ? If thou lovest Him, give me the book for His sake.'

'That I may not do,' replies Yusuf.

'Thou dost not love Christ,' cries the Moslem, striking him on the face.

Yusuf takes the insult meekly. ('They struck Him on the face.') The Moslem begins to read the story of the Crucifixion, and as he reads his conscience is stung. 'O man,' he says, 'do not be angry. Forgive me for the sake of *Isa el Masih* (Jesus the Christ).'

Meek the colporteur is, but not timorously meek. Stephanos Maqar knows how and when to stand upon his rights. He offers a Gospel to a Sudanese officer. When the officer sees what the book is, he curses and reviles the Bibleman. One of the crowd takes

the book from the officer and returns it to Stephanos. Stephanos enters the shop of a Berber, and as he is sitting there the officer strides in angrily.

'Hast thou permission,' he asks, 'to sell these books of the Christians?'

'When thou art a *Mamour* (chief of police) here,' replies Stephanos, rising gravely, 'I will answer thy question.'

A little later Stephanos goes to the police headquarters; the officer is there, and Stephanos sells a Bible to the *Mamour* before the face of the Sudanese ruffian.

Seldom indeed do you find the Bibleman taken aback.

In Hungary Vlaovics offers the Scriptures to a gendarme. The officer jauntily slaps the scabbard of his sword. 'This is my Bible,' he says. 'Yes,' replies Vlaovics, with a kindly glance, 'but your Bible kills; mine brings to life.'

In a fashionable café near Paris Exchange the colporteur is offering his books to the gay and well-groomed business men. 'Will the New Testament,' asks one of them, 'help me to make a million?' '*Mais, monsieur*,' Gaboriaud answers with a smile, 'much more than that—if you read it carefully.'

Here is a Brahman resting under a tree by the wayside, and preparing to chew betel-nut and tobacco. The colporteur offers him a book.

'I must not defile myself,' says the scrupulous man. 'The books may be good, but you who carry them eat flesh.'

'Sir,' responds the colporteur, 'you are about to chew tobacco; can you tell me through how many unclean hands it has passed?'

The Brahman shrugs his shoulders, but can find no answer.

'Those books are not fit to touch,' cried an Italian carabineer, at one time a student for the priesthood. 'They are condemned by the Holy Father.'

'So is your handsome uniform,' rejoins Cupertino. 'Do you not know that in 1870 his Holiness excommunicated our gallant king and all his army?'

'Bravo!' exclaims the carabineer's officer, and at once buys a Bible.

Colporteur Spedicati approaches a group of harvest-men who have just laid themselves down in the shadow of the station at Taranto. He has scarcely had time to speak when one of the group assails him with a volley of oaths

in which the Madonna's name is profaned again and again. 'Young man,' interposes Spedicati, 'listen! Have you never heard the words, "For, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." Those beautiful words,' he continues as he opens the Gospel, 'were spoken by the Madonna, the mother of our Lord.' As he dwells on the dishonour that had just been done to her name the angry harvester slinks away, and one of the others buys a book.

Near Avignon, the sometime city of the Popes, a man asks the colporteur: 'Can you tell me whether your books are those which tell about the follies of the priests?' 'Yes,' Charvet answers, 'and also about mine and yours.'

The colporteur relies on patience and painstaking, but he does not despise the arts that attract a crowd.

In Morocco Aisa Farah notes the rings of dusky faces round the snake-charmer, and the groups of Moors sitting with eyes and ears intent on the story-teller. He too dons a Moorish *jelab*, takes a Moorish guitar, and gathers round him audiences of fifty or a hundred listeners.

At a street corner in some Japanese town

Kawakami stops the wayfarers with the music of his violin, until the gathering seems ready to hear a Bible story.

Pacing up and down alongside the train in the Bombay station a Bibleman is singing a favourite hymn, which awakens the interest of the native passengers. A Hindu gentleman, returning from some festival at Pandhrapur, stops him to ask what song-book he is selling. The Bibleman tells him the subject of the hymn; then, holding up the Gospel of St. John, 'In this little book,' he says, 'you will find the whole story simply related.' The large open railway car in which the gentleman sits is full of people who listen for nearly a quarter of an hour as the Bibleman reads various passages to them. When he has done, almost every one in the car buys a copy.

It is near sunset, and a colporteur with a lantern has reached an old Indian temple. He tells the priest of the pictures he can show, and permission is readily given him to use the temple. The villagers gather round. A sheet screens off the poor old gods, and as one magical scene after another moves slowly across its surface, the Bibleman tells the story of Bethlehem and Nazareth, of the loaves and fishes, of the slumber on the stormy sea,

of Bethany, and of the three crosses on Calvary.

Here in Korea, where once on a time women used to have no names of their own, and when there was a crowd the street was white, not black, with people, Kim the Korean goes about with his delightful assistant Skylark, a donkey who pretends to eat books. Kim offers his Gospels, and if a man will not buy a copy, 'Why, look here!' cries Kim, passing the book to Skylark, who takes hold of it at once with his lips; 'this donkey is wiser than you are; *he* takes what is offered him.' And as a rule the man laughs and pays for a copy.

It is little use trying to put the colporteur off with excuses; he has heard them too often.

'I would willingly buy your book,' says a servant-maid in Flanders, 'but I should have to go all the way up to the top of the house for the money.'

'Well,' responds Vanhoucke, 'it was all the way from Heaven that our Lord came down to save us.'

'That is true,' says the maid; 'and the top of the house is not so very far after all.'

'We do not want any books to-day,' says a French lady; 'call again.'

'Thank you, madame,' says Lheurette;

then, looking gravely at her, he inquires, 'Is madame sure that she will still be here when I call next week?'

'We will buy another time,' two young women tell Desbiot. Desbiot bows. 'May I then leave you,' he asks, 'something to remember my visit by?'

'Oh yes.'

'Well, it will be the reading of a few verses from the Gospel.'

'Oh,' they laugh, 'we thought it would be something more substantial; but do read, if you would like to.'

Desbiot reads the parable of the wise and foolish virgins: 'And while they went out to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.'

The girls exchange glances, and each takes a Testament.

'Is it enough to read your book to be saved?' Desbiot is asked at another house. 'Is it enough,' he asks in return, 'to look at bread when you are hungry?'

'Why do you sell such old rubbish as the Gospel?' inquires a scoffer. 'Death is older still,' is the answer; 'and the Gospel changes it into life.'

'I buy only useful things,' says another; 'what is the book good for?' 'What is a signpost good for?' he is asked. 'It shows the way.' 'That,' replies the Bibleman, 'is what the New Testament does.'

Few know the Bible so well as the man who goes forth to sell it. It is his bed-fellow, his bread-fellow, his comrade by the way. He carries it in his head and in his heart as well as in his pack. He does not skip even *Ezekiel*, which is said to be the book least read among ourselves.

Yung Sung Kun the Korean could have found you in a twinkling any fragment of a text in the New Testament. Shimoon David the Armenian, who fell in a Turkish massacre at Urumia, was called 'the Walking Concordance.' His reading and thinking had schooled him for all the unforeseen happenings that came his way, and the flippant or foolish questions he was expected to answer. And his colleagues are equally prompt when a serious question is raised.

Here in Madras a Hindu gentleman examines the Bibleman's books with deepening frowns. 'These books,' he declares angrily, 'should be destroyed; they forbid the worship of idols? In your schools do you teach geo-

graphy without maps? No, how could you? And how shall we teach our people about God without images of Him?'

'Yes,' the Bibleman answers, 'but how can you map a country until you have seen it, until you have travelled over it, until you know it as it is? So it is with God. No man who has not seen Him with his earthly eyes can make an earthly image of Him. Listen to what is written: "God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."'

Visiting the ships at Port Said, that Babel of the Eastern and the Western seas, the colporteur finds a Chinese crew on an English ship. As he is showing his books in the fo'c'sle he sees a Chinaman lighting a candle before an idol on a little altar. He asks what the image represents, and the Chinaman points to the sky; but another Chinaman rolls from his bunk and exclaims, 'That is God!'

'How can that be, since it was made by men?' rejoins the colporteur, and he reads aloud from the Hundred and Fifteenth Psalm of the idols, the work of men's hands:

> 'They have mouths, but they speak not;
> Eyes have they, but they see not;
> They have ears, but they hear not.'

The boatswain, who knows English, translates as he reads, and before the colporteur leaves the ship the men buy a Psalter and several copies of the Gospels in Chinese.

In the fruit-market at Valparaiso the owner of one of the stalls began to banter Colporteur Diaz on his pleasant way of making a living. 'And I suppose,' he added, 'you have some landed property?' '*Si, señor*,' said Diaz. 'Ah, where?' asked the fruit-seller. 'In Heaven,' replied Diaz—'purchased for me with the blood of Christ.'

A number of soldiers began to ridicule and laugh at Colporteur Palaci as he approached them in the square of Lima barracks. 'Aha! we are to have business with an Evangelist!' said one. 'I am a *diablo*!' laughed another. 'I am a free-thinker!' cried a third, 'and I don't want anything about God.'

'I have a story of a young man as wicked as yourself,' said Palaci, and began to read: 'A certain man had two sons——'

'Ah yes,' said the *diablo*, 'my father had two sons.'

'The younger of them said to his father,' continued the colporteur.

'Yes, I am the younger, and my running away has brought me down to the devil and

the barrack-room. Sell me your book ; mark the page you have been reading, for it pleases me after all.'

In Petropolis, near Rio de Janeiro, a Bibleman offers his books to a group chatting at a German baker's shop. 'You Protestants,' interposes the shopkeeper, 'declare that you are right ; the Romanists say that they are right ; the spiritualists hold that they are right ; what are we to believe ? Look here '—and he leads the Bibleman to a large brick oven, glowing red hot ; 'put your arm inside there ; if it is not burnt, then I shall know that yours is the true religion ; but if it is burnt, your religion is false.'

'No,' replies the Bibleman, 'by God's grace I will not obey the devil's orders.'

'Am I the devil then ? ' laughs the shopkeeper.

'No, but it is the devil that tells you to say that to me. What did he say to our Lord in the hour of His temptation ? ' and he reads how Satan bore Him to the holy city and set Him on a pinnacle of the temple, saying, 'If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down : for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee, and in their hands they shall bear Thee up.'

The man listens as the Bibleman reads, and in the end buys a Bible, while one of his companions takes a Gospel.

'Nobody reads the Bible nowadays,' says a man in Chile; 'it is fit only for children and ignorant people.' 'Is the President of Chile a child or an ignoramus?' asks Colporteur Palma. 'No, why?' 'Because the President when he takes the oath of office lays his hand on this book which you despise, and swears "By God, our Lord, and these holy Gospels."'

'If thou canst tell me where the Messiah is,' says a Jew in a city between the two Niles, 'I will take thy book.'

'The Christ,' answers Stephanos Maqar, 'is in heaven, and on earth, and is also found in my heart, and in the heart of every one who confesses that He is the Saviour of the world.'

'I am well pleased with thy saying,' the Jew responds. 'I will take four copies of the New Testament. I love every one who without shame confesses the Messiah before men.'

'Whither dost thou turn at the hour of prayer?' asks a pious Moslem at Port Said.

'Whither should I turn?' says Segal, who can be wise in twelve languages.

'We, the true believers,' the Moslem explains, 'turn to Mecca, the holy place; and

the Jew turns to Jerusalem ; but to what holy place dost thou, a Christian, turn ? '

' I turn my face heavenward,' says Segal, ' to the one true God.'

' Verily thou hast the truth,' the Moslem concedes, ' for the Holy Person is more than the holy place.'

And the Bibleman is not slow to perceive analogies.

In Morocco, where coin is often scarce, a Jew offers a small travelling mirror for a copy of St. Luke. ' It is good exchange for you,' he remarks with a shrewd smile. ' And that little book is a glass too,' replies the colporteur. ' Look into it and you will see your heart.'

Juzina ascends into a lighthouse on the Dalmatian coast. The keeper shows him his lamps and reflectors, and tells him of the reefs and sandbanks, and of the mountain gorges through which the great squalls strike.

' It takes some knowing,' observes Juzina appreciatively, as he produces a Croatian Bible from his pack. ' And this too,' he says, ' is a shining light by which men steer their lives through perils of storm and darkness and affliction, and so come happily to port.'

The Dalmatian agrees that a lighthouse is the very place for such a book.

Dervishes are not regarded as the readiest of book-buyers. In a village outside Teheran a Bibleman meets one and salutes him courteously, '*Salam alaikum*, Peace be with you, O servant of Allah ! whither are you going, my friend ? '

' I am going into the village to beg for food and money so that I may have a meal.'

' And how many *krans* do you hope to gather in the course of two hours ? '

' About one *kran* (4d.),' he answers.

' Good,' says the Bibleman ; ' and if I give you one *kran* you will spare the time to stay and talk with me ? '

The dervish agrees. He is an Afghan, he says, and explains how he was once a rich man, but in his desire to serve God he had left home and affluence and had become a mendicant.

' Have you not made a mistake,' asks the Bibleman, ' in thinking that this life which you have chosen would be pleasing to God ? You are healthy and strong and able to work for your living ; but now you are taking money and food which should go to the blind and the weak who cannot work ; and though you are a devout man, you have no message to take to your fellow-men of a Saviour from sin.'

'Ah,' says the dervish, 'gladly would I know of one who could save me from sin and make me a friend of Allah ; but I know him not.'

The Bibleman reads to him a chapter of St. John and other passages from the Scriptures ; and when at length he bids him farewell he pays him his *kran*, and gives him a copy of the New Testament. Some days later he sees the dervish sitting in a tea-house, reading the book aloud to others.

Even the verse of a Persian poem may at times have an echo of a Bible phrase. 'Of what use,' says a Persian gentleman to a colporteur who approaches him as he sits at the entrance of his garden—' of what use are your books to one who has the delight of all these flowers ? '

The colporteur quotes, in reply, from the beautiful poem in which Saadi, thinking how the grass withereth and the flower fadeth, sings of books which are the delight of years. The owner of the garden is pleased with the answer. He buys a book and presents the colporteur with a bunch of flowers. ' I give you,' he says, ' some of the flowers that fade ; you have given me of the eternal flowers.'

As Colporteur Vecchi was giving away

Gospels to Italian soldiers during the Great War, one of the men, taking him aside, asked the reason for this distribution. 'It is in order that while the guns are thundering,' replied Vecchi, 'the Lord Jesus may speak His love and His gospel of peace to man's heart; and that while death reigns, so too the hope may reign of everlasting life through Him.'

The soldier shook hands with him warmly, and went his way with a Gospel.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BIBLEWOMAN

As one turns from the record of the colporteurs to that of the Biblewomen, remembrance calls up a vision of the hills of Galilee, and of the 'many women which followed Jesus, ministering unto Him'; and who can doubt that, as of old, the Master is truly present with these sisters of Joanna, Susanna, and the Maries who are ministering to Him to-day in many lands? In reading the story of what we may call the first English Biblewoman, it is difficult to resist the feeling that this beginning of what was afterwards a far-reaching mission was shaped by divine influence.

On a bleak night in 1853, in the nightmare region of Seven Dials, Marian B——, who had taken shelter in an alley from the rain, was attracted by the service in a small mission hall. She entered, and at the close the missionary lent her a Bible, the reading of which opened a new life to her.

After the death of her heart-broken mother,

Marian's drunken father had brought her to one of the low lodging-houses in the crowded slums of the parish of St. Giles, and had died shortly afterwards. Marian was then less than sixteen years old, and he had left to her care a small sister of five. The cutting of ornamental fire-papers, moulding of wax-flowers, and making of bags for silversmiths afforded them a bare living. She was taught to read and write by a lodger in the same house, a kindly old man but an atheist, who warned her against reading the Bible. At eighteen she married, but her husband, though sober and steady, was as poor as herself.

The Bible from the mission hall had brightened for her even Seven Dials with a happy trust in the Divine Fatherhood; it sustained her through two years of penury and sickness; and early in 1856 she wrote to the missionary offering such help as she could give to the ailing and fallen in the parish.

It was in the summer of that year that Mrs. Ranyard, who had just come to reside in London, first saw for herself the rookeries of St. Giles's. From girlhood Ellen Henrietta White (as she then was) had been a zealous Bible and church worker. At the age of sixteen she and her friend Elizabeth Saunders

caught fever while visiting the poor. Elizabeth died, but for Ellen long years of devoted service were reserved. In 1839 she married Benjamin Ranyard.[1] In the Jubilee year of the Bible Society she published *The Book and Its Story*, a memorial of her attachment to the Society and of her love of the Word of God, which she had brought to many a poor home. Sixty thousand copies, apart from translations, were called for up to 1859.

Mrs. Ranyard's heart was moved to its depths when she realised the condition of Seven Dials and its surroundings, places which should have been memorable among the parishes of London. Centuries before, when St. Giles's was a country village, men and women came together in these 'Fields' for the reading of the forbidden book—Wycliffe's Bible in the mother tongue. On a January night in 1414 a meeting of these 'Men of the Book' was taken by surprise in some sheltering copse; twenty were killed on the spot, and thirty-nine were hanged and burnt near the place of their capture.[2] On Christmas Day, three years later, Sir John Oldcastle was

[1] Their son, Arthur Cowper Ranyard, the astronomer, was born in 1845 and died in 1894.

[2] See Tennyson's poem, 'Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham.'

dragged on a hurdle to the Fields of St. Giles, and hung alive in chains over a slow fire.

To Mrs. Ranyard the spread of the Gospel appeared to be the only means of redeeming this lawless and forlorn district. Marian B——, who was acquainted with every corner of the place, who knew the people and their ways, and feared neither hurt nor hindrance, was engaged to sell the Scriptures. Within six months 147 Bibles and 207 Testaments were disposed of among people who had seemed hopeless. With the help and counsel of Mr. Thorold, the new Rector (afterwards Bishop of Rochester and then of Winchester), the Bible and Domestic Female Mission was founded. The number of workers was increased from 6 in the first year to 160 in the fourth; in all, 27,000 Bibles and Testaments were sold; and £2090 had been granted in aid from the Jubilee Fund of the Bible Society.

In 1863 nearly every town and city in England had its Biblewoman, maintained by local contributions. The Biblewoman appeared in France and Germany, and had taken her place in Syria, Bombay, and Calcutta for that branch of mission work on which only a woman could venture. Up to the close of 1883 the grants of the Bible Society exceeded £16,500, and it then

undertook the systematic employment of native Christian women under the direction of missions among Oriental peoples.

The effect of these measures was quickly seen. 'We do not greatly fear your schools,' said a Hindu to Dr. Clark of Amritzar about 1887; 'we need not send our children. We do not fear your books, for we need not read them. We do not much fear your preaching; we need not listen. But we dread your women, and we dread your doctors; for your doctors are winning our hearts, and your women are winning our homes, and when our hearts and homes are won, what is there left to us?'

On the eve of the Centenary of the Bible Society, 680 Biblewomen were subsidised in the Near and Far East, copies of the Scriptures were circulated in thousands, and several hundreds of native women were taught to read in the course of the year. The Society's Report for 1907-8 dwells on the welcome progress that had already been made. 'Christianity,' we read, 'has achieved, perhaps, no greater triumph than the elevation of womanhood. A position of degradation and slavery in the home has given place to one of true comradeship and motherhood. To those, therefore, who recognise firstly that the stronghold of

Oriental religions is the *zenana*, and secondly, that the influence of a Christian wife and mother is in her own sphere almost limitless, very little exercise of imagination is needed to picture the effect upon the future of India of the conversion to Jesus Christ of the womanhood of the country.'

As a beautiful example of the change which was, and still is, being wrought by the Word of God in Eastern lands, the following description, by a lady missionary, is given of her Bible-woman's visit to a Hindu home : ' Manoharam Lazarus, though a new Bible worker, seems to be already a favourite with the caste people, and her lessons about Christ are listened to with close attention. On my recent visit with her to a caste house two beautiful young women, clothed in silk and jewels, sang reverently and sweetly the Christian lyrics taught by her, and as they sang and Manoharam talked, the spacious room filled silently with women, and also many men came, all seating themselves quietly and listening with absorbed interest as Manoharam told them of Christ's bearing the sins of the world and making us free. The girls said they would like to learn to read the Bible for themselves, it was so full of sweet and loving stories. It was a touching

and beautiful sight to see three or four generations of Hindus—the young, the old, and the strong middle-aged—all willing and glad to hear of Christ. The old grandmother brought in her grandson, a boy of nine years, the only male of the family, and said to me, "He is your son to do with him as you like, he is no longer mine but yours."'

In connection with this work one gladly remembers the distinguished Brahman widow, Pandita Ramabai, who in her sympathy for suffering child-wives and child-widows devoted her great gifts to their cause; founded a home for high-caste Hindu widows in 1889; rescued hundreds of girls from starvation and shame in the cruel famine years 1896-97 and 1900; and only a few days before her death in April 1922 begged for God's blessing on the Bible Society. Mr. R. A. Adams, on visiting her, found that she could no longer either hear or speak, but she was able to write in pencil this farewell: 'I want to say that I greatly appreciate the Bible Society's work. I have been a Christian for thirty-eight years. I have found a great salvation through the Society's work. God bless you and yours.'

CHAPTER XV

SUSANNA AND THE MARIES

Down to the second year of the Great War every account of these Gospel Sisters gave a wonderful impression of their ubiquity. They seemed to be at work—reading, speaking of the Saviour, answering questions and explaining, teaching to read, singing hymns, circulating the Scriptures—everywhere ; in high-caste *zenanas*, in the *bazars*, in Medical Mission dispensaries, at Hindu festivals, in low-caste villages where many of the men even were illiterate. In the hospitals a blind Bible-woman might have been heard reading the Gospel aloud from her copy 'in Braille' ; another Biblewoman, herself a patient, might have been seen reading to the patients around her. Others again went on with their work, for sheer love of the work, during their holidays.

They seemed to be at work *everywhere* ; not solely in the cities and villages, by the shrines and temples of the six great Indian Auxiliaries, but in Burma and Ceylon ; in Malaya, Man-

churia, Korea; in Lima and Valparaiso between the towering Andes and the immense Pacific; in Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Petropolis, and Bahia; in Cape Town; in Mauritius and the Seychelles; in Eritrea, Upper and Lower Egypt, Palestine, Damascus, Mosul.

Here, as so indubitably elsewhere, the Word of God manifested its power.

At Dacca, in eastern Bengal, two women, 'seeking the good of their souls,' came from a great distance to the festival of 'The Lord of the World' (Jaganath, or Juggernath). They stood and listened to the Biblewomen preaching, and at the close, 'Never,' they said, 'never did we think we should hear such beautiful words. Truly you seem to *know* whom you worship and to find what you seek. Ours is all guess-work, like that of blind people groping in the dark'; and they bought several copies of the Gospels to take back home with them.

Calling with her Biblewoman, a lady worker of the U.F.C. Mission was told by an inmate of the *zenana* that the night before she had had a dream in which she had seen Christ Jesus standing with outstretched arms. She had spoken of it to her friends, and they had endeavoured to assure her that it was one of her

own Hindu gods who had appeared to her. 'But no, *mem*, it was not ; it was Jesus with His pierced hands, about whom the *Guru Ma* (the Biblewoman) had been telling me. He was showing me how He loves me and shares my troubles and sorrows.'

The most serious hindrance to an open acceptance of Christianity in these homes was, and is still, the estrangement and bitter persecution to which an Indian woman exposed herself when she forsook the religion of her people. She might set aside the customs of her caste, refuse to sacrifice to idols, acknowledge the worthlessness of her old gods ; she might have the sympathy and even the encouragement of her husband, yet the dread of her kinsfolk was so deterrent that she might hesitate long before she avowed her belief in Christ. Still, in that time of hesitation, thanks to the Divine Goodness, it has happened that the possible persecutors have been brought to a knowledge of God.

In a home in North India, where the father was dead, two Hindu girls, taught by the Biblewoman, were reading the Gospel with delight, and the mother had no fear of confessing her faith. When three of her little children fell ill of smallpox, her relations and

neighbours besought her to sacrifice to the goddess and to observe the usual rites, lest the goddess should be angry and the children should die. She would not hear them, and prayed only in the name of the Lord Jesus. To her joy and to the strengthening of her faith the little children were spared to her.

In another house a Hindu widow who had been for two years under instruction, and who now felt that the end was drawing near, sent her son for the Biblewoman. 'Dear teacher,' she said to her, 'sing to me once more that hymn of "Christ who has saved my soul."' As the teacher sang, the dying woman joined faintly in the familiar refrain, and an hour or two later when she passed away, the last words on her lips were the last words of the hymn—*Prána bachaiyá, Yisu Masíh*, 'Jesus Christ has saved my soul.'

A significant example of Oriental superstition and an instance of the effective work of the Biblewomen are recorded in two incidents which happened at Mukden several years ago. A community of Buddhist nuns who had charge of various temples in the old Manchu capital was frequently visited by the Biblewomen, who came to know many of them. Their livelihood depended on the faith of their adherents, and much was expected from the

sale of 'merit' to be acquired by one of the sisterhood. In a high narrow box with long sharp-pointed nails driven inward through the wood on all sides this devoted nun sat, very thinly clad, and so cramped and enclosed that at every unguarded movement the nails could not fail to pierce her. By these voluntary sufferings she 'acquired the merit' which could be made available for others. On the outer side of the box a red slip attached to each nail-head gave its number and its value, which ranged, according to the pain or the injury inflicted, from five shillings to twelve pounds. The names of the purchasers were taken down by another nun; the suffering sister was not released until the last nail had been bought; and then the accumulated 'merit' was divided *pro rata* among the purchasers. This sale of 'merit' was becoming profitable when an enlightened Chief of Police stepped in with his prohibition. The sisterhood looked round for help, and in their anxiety for their revenues appealed to the Bible Society's representative, Mr. Turley, to intercede with the authorities on their behalf.

They sent a still more interesting appeal shortly afterwards. The Society's Biblewoman had long been calling on their Mother Superior,

and had evidently drawn her towards Christianity. Would not Mr. Turley stop his Biblewoman and the children of the blind school from praying for their Mother Superior? 'What with Mrs. Shih's (the Biblewoman's) teaching, and the Gospels that the Mother is reading, she is losing all interest in our Order, and is always talking about your God. So we want you to tell your school and Mrs. Shih to stop their prayers, or we fear we shall lose her.'

Far away in Egypt, while a Biblewoman was reading aloud in the open the parable of the Prodigal Son, a man came and stood by, listening attentively. When the chapter was finished, 'I am that man,' he said. 'I left my father and would not return, though he often begged me to do so. Finally, when I did come home, I learned that he had died. My heart is sore and I am sad. What shall I do? I have no rest because of my sins.' The Biblewoman pressed him to go to the Heavenly Father and ask to be forgiven. 'I do not know how to pray, or how to read,' he answered. Then the Biblewoman taught him to say, 'Have mercy, O Lord, upon me, Thy sinful servant.' Some days afterwards he returned and said, 'My burden is easier, but I want you to read to me often.'

Another Egyptian Biblewoman, on learning that there had been a quarrel in a house she visited, read from St. Matthew xviii. : 'Then came Peter and said to Him, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?"' As they listened to the reading, the offended woman slipped quietly away and brought her *narghile*, which she passed from one to another, and this pipe of peace (smoked through the water of oblivion) was followed by cups of the coffee of reconcilement.

During a tour in the wilds of the Northern Province, Ceylon, a lady missionary and her Biblewoman came upon two gangs of elephant-trappers at work in the jungle round Tannutte and Munkalun. They went to see four elephants which had been captured, and after a long talk with the men gave them some tracts. A week later, on their return homeward, they reached a small rest-house, and found the same men camped under a large tree hard by. The trappers approached them and asked for books, but their supply of Scriptures had been disposed of during the tour, and one copy alone, the Gospel of St. John, was left. That, with two or three tracts, was given them. At once they began to read the Gospel aloud under

their tree, and next morning they came again, asking eagerly for more books. But books and tracts were now done, and no more could be had in these wilds. Two days later, and for the third time, the travellers fell in with the elephant-trappers, camped by the roadside. The first words the men spoke were about the books—books like the last one, they did not want tracts. They would be deep in the jungle for two weeks more, on the track of more elephants, living on wild-fowl and what they could take with them, camping under the trees ; and they did want more books to read, like the last one. The Biblewoman offered to give up her New Testament. The precious volume was given to them, and as radiant with delight as though they were children, they departed hugging their new treasure.

Fifteen years ago this was what a lady missionary saw of a Burmese home which she visited with her Biblewoman : a bamboo hut, with no furniture but the sleeping mats ; in one corner a large advertisement of a firm of biscuit-makers, showing the biscuits of the firm offered in sacrifice in the Shwe Dagon Pagoda ; below this picture a shelf with flowers and offerings of various kinds—and this was their *Payah*, their god. The lot of women in Burma

seemed less unhappy, it was certainly more free, than that of their Indian sisters, yet, despite the active part they took in daily affairs and their devotion to their Buddhist shrines, they were looked down on as an inferior class.

A lady missionary met an old Burmese woman going to the pagoda to worship. The poor creature said she was making an effort to acquire 'merit,' but alas! how could she ever gain 'merit' enough to outweigh her 'demerit'? When asked what hope then had she for the great future that was to come, she lifted up her trembling hands and brought them together so that the forefingers made a cross. 'Do you mean Jesus?' she was asked. 'Yes,' she answered. Further questioning showed that, though she knew little else, she did know that He is the Saviour of those who cannot save themselves.

One wonders if any tablet in the Leper Home at Mandalay bears the name of the Biblewoman Ma Nan Paw. She had become a Christian through the teaching of a mission school; in the flower of life she was smitten with leprosy; the rest of her story, through many years, is contained in two brief passages from letters she wrote: 'By the kindness of God I am come to the home of lepers in Man-

dalay. Here I am to teach His law, and in teaching it I am glad. For this purpose I am persuaded that He has brought me here. . . . God planned that I should be brought to this place. I praise His mercy.' Within a week of her death, a very old Moslem woman lay dying. Struggling for breath, she prayed to be baptized before the end. 'I was won for Christ,' she said, 'by Ma Nan Paw.'

In visiting the hospitals in Buenos Aires the Biblewoman met with much opposition from the priests and the Sisters of Mercy. Time after time she was forbidden admittance, or threatened with expulsion, but an appeal to the authorities usually resulted in the Sisters being reminded that their duty was confined to the nursing of the patients.

In a large suburb of Rio de Janeiro a Biblewoman and her young sister stopped at a house, clapped their hands (it is not the custom to 'knock'), and asked if they might enter. They were courteously received, and they explained why they had called. The father told them he was an atheist, 'but one of those atheists who believe in God.' After a prayer that the Holy Spirit might guide them the Biblewomen read the third chapter of the Gospel of St. John, in which Nicodemus comes

to our Lord at night, and all listened with great attention. Then the father bought a Bible, and one of the daughters a New Testament, and they promised to attend the mission church.

'And who are you?' was the forbidding inquiry as a young woman opened the door a few inches. 'I am a reader of the Word of God,' was the Biblewoman's answer. It was a gracious voice which rejoined, 'Come in, come in; I will tell mother to come and hear the beautiful words.' 'This house is your house,' was the mother's greeting, as she came at her daughter's call. The Biblewoman read to them and spoke of the Saviour, and as she rose to leave them, the mother said, 'I never heard this before. Come again and read more to us.'

In one of the poorest streets of Valparaiso a lady-worker of the Bible Society visited an old woman who was living in the most cruel poverty. She first gave her food, then read to her from the New Testament of Him who became poor for our sake. As the poor old woman took the book in her hand, 'Surely,' she said, 'God is in this place.'

'Brahmans and other high-caste Hindus,' wrote the Biblewoman Ruth of her work in

Trichinopoly, Madras, 'have put themselves under my instruction. At first they refused to receive me, or only allowed me as far as the threshold and listened to me at a distance. Now they are ten times more friendly. I began by telling them the stories of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Job, and Christ. When I saw that their interest was awakened, I gave them Scripture portions to read. Fifteen of my hearers are reading them regularly, and some of them have acknowledged that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is wonderful.'

The work of the Biblewomen, which is in the home rather than in the street, is to impart knowledge of the Scriptures rather than to sell them; yet on occasion they can prove themselves admirable colporteurs. Two years ago, in the Andong district, Korea, the Women's Preaching Society of the Poongkee Church were anxious that Colporteur Chang should preach in a town in which he had distributed his books. Their request could not be granted, as Chang was a Bible Society colporteur and his business was to sell the Scriptures. Whereupon the women undertook to do his work for him. Consent was accordingly given; Chang preached, and the women bought his stock and put it into circulation

They begged to have him for another month, and readily accepted the condition that six hundred instead of five hundred copies should be sold. One of the new believers at once took a hundred Gospels for sale among unbelievers.

In this new corps of Biblewomen at Big Dragon Mountain there was a woman who had been bedridden for years before becoming a Christian, and was now as well and alert as the others. No, she said in answer to inquiries, she had not gone to 'a revival,' she had recovered in her local church. To this case there was a curious sequel. Hearing of this woman's cure, a wretched man who had drunk himself into disease sent his wife to inquire whether *she* might not believe, and *he* be healed through her belief. He was taught the meaning of faith, accepted guidance to the Divine Healer, and recovered his health.

In this same year, 1923, an old Biblewoman, still working of her own accord, was questioned by the headman of a Bengal village which she was visiting. 'Mother,' he said, 'you walk about in the sun day after day and talk to people; what do you gain by it?' '*You* are my gain,' she replied. 'I your gain! What is this, mother?' 'See,' she said, 'I come

and tell you of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness He offers for sin, and the heaven that is opened for those who are forgiven—is that no gain to you?' Pleased with her reply, 'Go to every house,' the man said, 'and tell them about this Jesus!'

In recent years the Bible Society has been relieved of much of the expense connected with the invaluable work of the Biblewoman by the maintenance supplied by the Society's friends in Great Britain, Australia, and India. A change, too, is taking place in various regions. In Korea, for instance, where the old custom which isolated women is yielding to a new freedom, it is now possible for a man to sell books to them. Only nine Biblewomen were employed in 1923, compared with more than thirty in 1913. Still, however, there are voices calling from many lands for these zealous handmaids of the Gospel.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MOTHER TONGUE

Though it has been part of ourselves longer than we can remember, few of us have ever thought how much we owe to our mother tongue. Constant use of it has made us almost unaware of all that it is to us ; and yet to an Englishman abroad in a foreign land there can seldom come a surprise more heart-stirring than to hear a young voice speaking English among strangers. For a moment there is an illusion of the streets and traffic or of the woods and fields of home, and in spirit he is with those most dear to him. He may travel with many languages, but the sound of a few words reveals to him that it is in English he lives both in the present and in the past.

A number of years ago the Bible Society's sub-agent in Morocco met with a solitary Englishman at El-Kasar, of whom he wrote : 'He had not heard the Bible read for years, and the words he listened to were as water in the desert to a thirsty man. He came to my

room, and we talked of the homeland till a late hour, when I suggested evening prayers. The couple of psalms which we read were not sufficient for him, and he asked me to continue. As he talked to me of divine things there was a pathos and tremor in his voice which I had not noted before. The holy impressions of some sacred place at home were being recalled, and he was renewing the resolutions for good of days gone by. Before parting we prayed together that divine strength might be given him to follow the light in the midst of so much darkness.'

One cannot turn over many pages of the Society's Reports without alighting on some instance in which this instinctive feeling of the mother tongue blends with recollection of the hope and joy contained in the Word of God.

A dozen years ago, as Dr. Heine was engaged in Bible work in the streets of Sydney, Cape Breton, his attention was called by a shout. A Russian had recognised him, and in a few minutes he was surrounded by a crowd of Russians, all eager to buy the Scriptures. Forty copies of the New Testament were sold on the spot, and tears of joy ran down the cheeks of many when they saw the books in their own tongue. One of them, holding up

his copy in his hand, exclaimed, ' This is the book that will bring us light.'

They were newcomers ; and like them, the Lithuanians in St. John, New Brunswick, were filled with joy as they examined the diglots—the Word of God in their own tongue, verse for verse, alongside the English version. Many of them came together towards the Bible-stall and bowed thrice in acknowledgment, and nearly every one sent thanks to the Bible Society.

' I want the book in Syriac,' said a poor old man whom the colporteur met in Cairo ; ' for fifteen years I have been deprived of it.' His eyes brightened as a copy was handed to him, and he said, ' How happy my wife and family will be to have it ! '

Two or three years ago the Malagasy soldiers in the large French camp in Syria were eager to possess the Scriptures. The French officer prevented them and ordered the Bibleman away, but the men sought him out, and were delighted to buy Testaments and Bibles in their native language.

At San Joaquim, Venezuela, a Jewish shopkeeper who had left his home in Morocco thirty years before, threw his hands up in gladness when a Venezuelan colporteur offered him a

Bible. 'Read me the story of Joseph,' he said; 'I have not heard it since I was a youth. Let me hear, too, a Psalm of David and a chapter from the Prophets.' The colporteur availed himself of the opportunity of showing that Christ Jesus was the Messiah foretold by the Prophets. The Jew listened earnestly to the close, and bought the New Testament with the Old. 'I will read them both,' he said.

At the Bible House in Toronto two foreigners were seen looking at the books in the window. They were invited to enter, and were shown among other volumes a Hebrew Psalter. One of the young men opened it, and after a glance at the page asked the depositary if he could read it. 'Yes,' replied the depositary, and as he proceeded to read, the other stranger nudged his companion and said in an undertone, 'He know our language.' 'Can you spell him?' the depositary was asked. He spelt a few words and heard the whisper, 'I tell you he know our language.' 'Yes,' was the reply, 'he read it almost like we do.' Then came quickly the question, 'What you think of our language?' 'It is a beautiful language,' the depositary answered, 'I wish I could speak it as well as read it,' and to his surprise he saw the tears run down the young

man's cheeks as he said with a sob, 'Oh, mister, it is good to have some one love you in a strange land where not many love you.'

'I shall never forget,' wrote a retired South African missionary after visiting the Paris prisons in 1924, 'a young Rumanian who wept and kissed my hand when I took him a Testament in his own language.'

A Ruthenian in Prague, who was given a Bible, was so deeply moved that he kissed it and wept over it, saying again and again, 'I did not think that I should ever possess such a book in my own mother tongue.'

After selling the Scriptures among sailors and fishermen at Sûr—Tyre, the once splendid sea-emporium between the East and the Nile and the shores of the Mediterranean—the Bibleman made his way to the prison. No sooner had its inmates seen the books in their own language than hands and arms were thrust out between the window bars. A few copies were sold, and others were given away to these poor souls.

During the Great War Gladescheff, the oldest of the Society's workers in Siberia, boarded a train in which there were many Italian prisoners of war. When they heard that the colporteur had books in their own

language, they crowded round him, and he soon sold out his small stock. One man kissed his hand and thanked him. 'God bless your Society,' he said; 'it is doing a good work.'

On a British troopship at Port Said, when some of the crew saw that the Bibleman had the Scriptures in various languages they brought a Russian fireman to him. He was the only Russian on board, and he spoke no tongue but his own. The Bibleman showed him a Russian New Testament, and told him the price on his fingers, but the poor fellow was penniless. He appeared so delighted, however, at the sight of his native language that the men bought the Testament for him.

Working on a train in one of the Baltic States a colporteur came upon some Estonian emigrants on their way to take ship for America. He offered them the Scriptures, but his words fell upon careless ears until he began to speak of the far-distant foreign country to which they were going, and in which they would be without friends, without the familiar services and meetings, without even the sound of their native tongue around them. As he talked to them they began to think that, after all, the Bible, a homely book far from home, was quite

worth taking with them, and they bought three copies.

Lately, if indeed not long ago, it has been common for Serbians who have come over from America for a holiday visit to the old country to take back a supply of the Serbian Scriptures on their return to the Far West. To those who had not been able to see home again the Word of God in their mother tongue has grown so precious that they have written to the depositary at Belgrade desiring him to provide their relatives with copies.

Far away on the other side of the world a tall swarthy man entered the Society's depot in Sydney, New South Wales, not many months ago, and asked for 'the book which is for all people.' 'The Bible?' the manager queried; but the stranger did not know by what title it was called.

'Oh yes, it is the Bible,' said the manager; 'that is the book for all people. We have published it—or at least some part of it—in more than five hundred and sixty languages.' The stranger was astonished—had never imagined there were so many languages in the world. 'Oh yes; twice as many!' he was told. 'Ah, but you do not print it in my language,' said the stranger sadly; 'I come

from just a little island.' 'Well,' rejoined the manager, 'sometimes we print for just a handful of people; where do you come from?' 'I come from the island of Malta.'

In a moment the manager took up a copy of *The Gospel in Many Tongues*, opened it, and showed him the entry 'Maltese.' The man gazed in surprise, and then with tears filling his eyes he exclaimed, 'Oh, it is my own beautiful language!' At the manager's request he read the text, St. John iii. 16: 'For God so loved the world . . .' 'And now,' he was asked, 'you want to have a Bible in your own beautiful language?' 'No,' he answered, 'I read and write English, and I want the book in English; but if you have a small portion in my language, I shall be greatly pleased to take it also.'

Here is another incident of 'only yesterday.' Looking at the open books in the depot window at Pera, on the Golden Horn, Constantinople, a lady who had come from the Caucasus saw the same text 'For God so loved the world . . .' on a page of *The Gospel in Many Tongues*; but in this instance it was printed in Kazan Turkish. That was her native language, and overjoyed at the thought of having the Gospels in it, she entered the depot. In the course of

conversation she spoke of her own conversion, and of the bitter persecution she had suffered at the hands of her relatives. Once in his anger her father had struck her with an axe, in hope to kill her. Later, when her child died, and her husband had buried it with Moslem rites, she had disinterred it under cover of night and laid it to rest in Christian ground.

A memorable incident at Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1920, was the appearance of Czech-Slovak soldiers at the close of the Great War—'a wonderful army, war-scarred, homesick'—whose exploit eclipsed the famous retreat of Xenophon and his Ten Thousand. They had retreated from the Ukraine, made their way five thousand miles through Siberia to Vladivostok, and crossed to Canada. As they waited at Halifax to embark for Europe the Biblemen mixed and conversed with them. Their own books, they said, were all worn out. One man showed a Testament, which he still treasured though there was hardly a whole leaf in it. Glad of heart they were and thankful to see once more the Word of God in the speech of their own country.

Surely no scholar was ever more fully in-

spired than the old compiler who named his Hebrew lexicon 'The Tents of Judah'; for it is only in 'the tents of language' that men can truly live in heart and mind and soul. And as we become aware of the vast and incessant drift and migration of people of every clime and colour, we cannot but think of the languages which they take with them, and which may be all that is left to attach them to the old home.

Some suggestion of that constant movement of human life is contained in the figures recorded at stations of the Bible Society's work. Among the ships at Port Said on the Suez Canal in 1923 there were 3100 copies of Scripture in fifty languages. In 1924 there were 103,960 copies circulated in sixty-eight languages from the Bible House in Buenos Aires, Argentine; 48,100 in eighty-six languages from that of Sydney, New South Wales; 39,702 in thirty-two languages from Melbourne, Victoria; from Singapore 143,315 in forty-seven languages for the mainland and island groups of Malaya. The census of 1911 showed a population of over seven millions in Canada, and the Bible depot in Winnipeg issued the Scriptures in nearly fifty languages; to-day the population is out-

growing 8,788,000 ; immigrants of numerous nationalities and a very Babel of tongues are landing on the shores of Vancouver and in the Atlantic ports, and Biblemen with many gifts of speech are distributing the Word of God among them.

We may well thank God if we may see, whether in a dream or with the mind's eye, wide regions of the world star-clustered with such ' tents ' lit up with the love, the hope, and the joy of the Gospel.

Yet never let the Tents of Darkness be forgotten. Seventeen years ago temples of the Hindu god Hunamun were built in the enchanting island of Trinidad. At the sound of the word memory goes back to that last morning in July 1498 when Columbus saw the three mountain peaks, and gave the island its name —' The Trinity.'

CHAPTER XVII

TENTS OF DARKNESS

Do we ever realise the wonderful change which the Gospel in the native tongue has wrought in the daily life of coloured races ; or have we ever attempted to picture to ourselves the troubled existence of vast populations overshadowed by monstrous superstitions and enslaved by the degrading festivals and forms of worship which these entail ?

Turn whither we will, on the icy shores of the north as in the tropical forest, in the desert as in the 'isles of enchantment,' there are myriads of human beings haunted by an almost inconceivable dread of evil spirits, of malignant ghosts of the dead, of magic, of the evil eye, of demons of disease and possession. Beautiful and benignant as they are, terror lurks in the sun and moon, terror in darkness and in the silence of vast spaces. Wind and water, the very rocks and trees may be ambuscades of invisible enemies. The wild creatures, which seem harmless or even friendly, are

watched with distrust ; they may be not wild creatures at all but the disguise of fatal influences.

Less than fifty years ago the early missionaries in Korea found hideous wooden figures, with grinning teeth and glaring eyes, set up to guard the roads from demons. The strange sounds one heard at dusk might be the voices of ghosts or the rustling of spirit-tigers in the pine-woods. Death or the demon of disease lurked in the shadow of rock and tree. Even terror was not a human sensation, but a vampire which fastened on the heart of a man.

In the Banks Islands people shunned chasms in the hills, for the reflection of a man's face in water would enable the spirit of the chasm to draw the life out of him.

In the New Hebrides one sought the goodwill of the spirits of ways and hill-tracks with betel-nuts and scented leaves laid on blocks of coral, or by colouring with red earth the large stones on the hills ; but even so, a boulder might leap out on a passer-by if his shadow fell upon it.

More perilous than the leaping stone was the cycas-tree in Pentecost Island. It changed in the twilight into a handsome young man or maiden garlanded with flowers, which sought

to lure the unwary to death in the woods or along the seashore.

Still more fatal, because its spell prevailed so widely among the Polynesian Islands, was the Mae-snake, which assumed the same attractive shapes, although a crimson croton leaf or a white amaranth flower was a sure talisman against its malice.

These spirit-snakes, however, are not confined to the coloured races. Corruptions of the ancient myths still survive in the Isles of Greece, and notwithstanding the efforts of the Greek Church, there lingers a belief in spirit-trees under which it is dangerous to sleep, and in spirits of the woods and streams, the cliffs and the sea, which injure children and beguile men with their music and sweet voices.

In British Honduras men of a dwindling Maya tribe, clearing the tropical jungle among the wonderful white stone ruins of Lubaantun for the explorers, believed that they had released spirits of evil from the soil and had been fatally smitten by them. Without resistance, without any symptom of illness, they lay down in their hammocks and died.

Overcome by an old-recurring horror of the spirits of the dark, the rickshaw coolies, syces, and servants at Simla three years ago

refused to go out after night closed. Sudden panics fell upon them, and they would cry out fiercely into the darkness to scare 'the murderers' who were abroad—the Mamiai-Walla seeking to carry off human victims to their lair.

During the eclipse of the sun in 1922, while astronomers with their huge telescope were testing the Einstein theory, the black men of North-Western Australia strove to appease the wrath of their Sun-god with a wild corroboree, and as the darkness passed from his face they broke into a tumult of wild joy.

Thousands of excited natives gathered on the banks of the Hooghly during the solar eclipse last January to propitiate with prayers, ablutions, and other rites the evil spirit striving to destroy the sun.

There are tribes in Central Africa who lay little twigs crossed upon their tracks to appease an angry god when it thunders.

Recently at Taichow, in the province of Chekiang, in the hope of bringing the long drought to an end, the farmers called on a Chinese official to preside at a ceremony in which the people worship a live frog in a bottle. The official refused, and the farmers attacked the soldiers, who fired upon the crowd. Twelve lives were lost; the city rose in an

uproar, and the foreigners, who were blamed for the action of the soldiers, were obliged to leave the place for safety.

A ' Festival of Ghosts ' is held yearly by the Chinese Buddhists in Peking. The streets are decorated with lanterns and artificial flowers ; priests attend from the monasteries for miles round, and tables are spread to feast the ghosts of the dead. Strange reports reached this country in 1921 of six girls who had been spirited away during the ceremony as a sacrifice to the gods, but were fortunately traced by the police and rescued.

Superstition takes numberless forms, and many of these date from a remote past. When the new railway was in course of construction from Hongkong to Canton in 1909, the Bible-men of the Sub-agency ran serious risks as they attempted to visit the populous villages about Shekling, where a bridge was being built across the East River. The water was wide, the current rapid, and evil spirits, it was believed, would thwart the builders unless human life was sacrificed.

A foreign engineer, taking levels for the bridge, turned his theodolite in the direction of a woman at work in the fields. The lens flashed, she saw him and fled home, and told

what had happened. Whether from fever or fright, she died in a few days, and the people were convinced that she had been caught—for souls can be caught by a mirror—to 'embrace' and secure a pile of the bridge. When the soul has been caught, the body leaves the grave when it has been three days buried and joins the soul in embracing the pile. Such stories were told of weird sights near the new bridge that the villagers in their dread opened the graves of their relatives for proof that their bodies still lay there. The poor Biblemen were angrily driven away with cries of 'Kill them! kill them! They are collectors of souls.'

This eerie belief had spread far in bygone times. When the old watch-towers and walls of the Imperial Palace at Tokio were being restored not long ago, the skeletons of a number of men and women were discovered in the foundations of one of the great towers erected more than three centuries ago. Willing sacrifices, or unhappy victims, they had been built in alive, standing upright with arms outstretched, a coin on each hand and one on the top of each head. Nor was this a unique instance of the belief in Japan three centuries ago.

The same barbaric faith was known in Europe. To secure the rampart round Copenhagen twelve master-masons built, to the music of minstrels, a vault over a girl as she sat at a table with toys and cakes. An innocent little child was ' built in ' to make impregnable the castles of Liebenstein and Reichenfels on the Rhine. In Albania the bridge at Arta cost the master-builder his wife, and the stronghold at Skutari the king his young bride.

Among these superstitions there is one of singular tenderness. A little Chinese son lies dead in the house. Should you chance to pass in the street, you may see his heart-broken mother at the door waving his little tunic. She thinks his spirit has lost its way, and that as it wanders seeking for its home it may see it, recognise it, come back and awake—her living child once more.

Christianity alone can free men from this fluttering apprehension of ' something mighty and horror-striking which makes them grovel in the dust ' ; and Christianity alone can bless them with an uplifting certainty of something as glorious and benign as it is mighty.

CHAPTER XVIII

LIGHTING THE TENTS

No year passes without fresh evidences of the power of the Word of God, and some of these carry one's thoughts back to the days of the Apostles.

At one of the outlying mission stations in Manchuria in 1909 a woman had for four days been lying rigid, with eyeballs turned back and blood-stained foam dropping from her lips. All kinds of remedies had been tried in vain, and her family were in despair. At last it was suggested that perhaps 'the Jesus religion' might save her, and a message was sent to a native Christian preacher. He came at their call. He assured them that all things were possible if they could but believe. In their willingness to try to believe they tore down all their idols and burnt them, and the preacher prayed beside the sick woman. The next day she was better, but still far from well. He returned, and reproaching them for having only a half-belief, he urged them to destroy

their shrine in the compound. Again he prayed—he and they together. The woman recovered rapidly, and so deep an impression was made by her restoration that fourteen neighbouring families renounced idolatry and became Christians.

In the country villages some twenty miles round Kwangchow, Honan, it was a common belief in 1915 that mental derangement was due to possession by evil spirits. In one instance, that of a woman who for years had been 'possessed,' and was the dread of the village, the local doctor advised that they should ask the help of a native colporteur. On the morning of his visit the woman, in a state of wild excitement, was telling the people that servants of the Lord Jesus were on their way, and that she would be delivered from her misery. The Bibleman commanded in the Holy Name that the demon should depart from her, and from that time she had been healed, and was earnestly learning the truths of the Gospel.

In certain districts of the Madras Agency demon-worship prevailed widely among the lower classes. A woman who 'danced with devils' in a Hindu temple came and sat down beside a Biblewoman as she was reading the

Scriptures to others. 'The wicked devils,' she said, 'take possession of me sometimes. Then I starve for three or four days. The devils break my joints and wring my body. Oh that I might be freed from their attacks!' The Biblewoman read to her from the Gospel how the Lord Jesus cast them out, and urged her to pray to her Saviour.

Similar strange instances occur in the experience of missionaries and colporteurs in Korea.

In a valley of the north-eastern mountains, not far from Ham-Heung, lives an old man who for forty years and more had been a faithful worshipper of the mountain which towers aloft in front of his house. After many years of intercession, he said, this spirit gave him a son, and the man was happy; but when the child was about three years of age the little creature sickened and died. In his misery the old man consulted a necromancer, and was told that this his only son had been taken away by the spirit of the mountain, and that unless he killed a cow and feasted the spirit, both he himself and his wife would share the same fate. The old man's heart burned with anger within him, and thenceforth, he swore, he would be the spirit's lifelong enemy.

It was about this time that one of the Society's colporteurs heard of this incident. He went to see the old man, and in the course of their talk invited him to become a Christian. 'Yes,' was the answer, 'I will be a Christian; but before I join you in the worship of God I have something to say.' He threw open the door of the house, and facing the mountain he said, 'Spirit of the mountain, give heed to my words. For forty years I have fed and faithfully worshipped you. I shall do so no longer. Know that from this day I am a Christian.' This happened in 1923. The old man is happy, and his heart is at peace, and he is a tower of strength to the little congregation with which he worships.

Apart from such cases as these, which may be too far outside our experience to be intelligible as spiritual happenings, the testimony of the people amply proves the mental change produced by the influence of the Scriptures.

At a gathering of Indian Christian workers some years ago the following were among the tributes paid to the Word of God:

'In it I hear the voice of Christ'; 'It presents to me the picture of my Lord'; 'It is as sunlight to my soul'; 'It purifies my heart'; 'It satisfies my spirit'; 'It is to me

the fountain of the Water of Life' ; 'It quenches my thirst' ; 'It is my food' ; 'It is the living Word' ; 'It is my great teacher' ; 'It is to me the way to Heaven' ; 'It is my special friend' ; 'It is God's dwelling-place' ; 'It is to me a bazaar of heavenly supplies' ; 'It is God's letter of love to my spirit' ; 'It is the ship that carries me home' ; 'It is the touchstone of my soul' ; 'It is my spiritual pasture' ; 'It is the spiritual Garden of Eden' ; 'It is my sword of warfare with sin and Satan' ; 'It is a province of the heavenly Kingdom.'

In many a land and among people of every colour the unexpected admission has been heard—'We never thought anything so beautiful could be said in our own language.' That sense of beauty carried with it illumination of the soul and freedom of the mind from superstitious dread. What a truly 'Catholic emancipation' has the Hundred and Fourth Psalm been for men who heard for the first time that they themselves and all they saw, from the stars in the sky to the grass in the fields, were the manifold works of God ; that He knew every winged creature ; that all the beasts of the forest were His, and that they should no longer go in fear of spirit-tigers, spirit-snakes, spirit-stones, spirit-trees. In

China the rainbow was believed to be a dragon which devoured children when it caught them ; in one of the Solomon Islands the people hid in their huts at sight of it lest boils should break out upon them ; how the children must have shouted with joy when they were told that God had given His angels charge over them, and that He had chosen the rainbow as a sign in the heavens that He remembered His promises.

'From the Bible,' wrote a missionary about his Chinese converts and 'inquirers,' 'they learn to read. The Bible purifies their language. The Bible supplies them with new inscriptions far deeper and more glorious than those on their walls. The Bible cleanses their faces, their homes, and their habits. The Bible opens for them new views of life and a brighter future.'

But who can anticipate all the ways in which it makes manifest its power? Towards the close of the nineteenth century a remarkable change had taken place in the public life of Korea. Patriotic demonstrations, especially on the Day of Independence and the birthdays of the Emperor and Crown Prince, had grown in popular significance, and—thanks to the native Christians—a new ardour had been

kindled in these displays of loyalty. On the Emperor's birthday in 1897 a special tribute was paid at night by a company from one of the native churches, who marched through Seoul with flags and lanterns, singing and delivering speeches. In the course of these one orator said: 'What has brought together to-night this assemblage to which we have come with our wives and children? It is the Christian religion. Through all the five centuries of our royal dynasty, whoever heard of a patriotic meeting, with prayers and speeches and singing and praise of our native land? What has taught us to love our country and to know the meaning of patriotism? It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.'

Visiting an out-station in the island of Amoy, off the south-east coast of China, a missionary came upon what seemed to him so strange as to be worth noting. He was accompanied by his colporteur, and as they stood on a hillside looking out on the radiant islands and sunlit sea under a cloudless sky, the colporteur suddenly turned to him and said, 'Is it not beautiful?' 'Beautiful indeed,' replied the missionary; 'but I thought that as a rule Chinamen paid little attention to such scenes.' 'Ah!' said the colporteur, 'I never saw any-

thing about me that I thought beautiful, or worth looking at, until I became a Christian. But since then the world grows every day more beautiful, and the more I see of it, the better I understand our Father in Heaven.'

It is at the end of the mortal day that the light in the Tents seems to shine most brightly.

At the annual meeting of the Bible Society in 1837 a missionary told of his visit to a Bushman chief. He found him sitting on the floor of his hut, an old man of ninety. He had been blind for years, but every day a child read the Bible to him, and it was from the Bible he had learned that he had a soul and that God had made him. On hearing the name of his visitor the old chief burst into tears, clasped his hands, and thanked God for his coming to see him. As he spoke of his condition he gathered up dust from the floor and said, 'In a little time I must mingle with this dust; but in this flesh I shall see God. I am blind; I shall not see the light of day; but by the light of faith I shall see Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ready to receive my soul.'

Thang Kui-sing was one of the colporteurs in the province of Shantung. A popular actor in his youth, he had gone into Manchuria, had there found Christ, and had devoted to God

his great gifts of memory and impassioned speech. Passing safely through the Boxer persecution, he returned to Tsingtau, his birthplace, and took up colportage, living here and there among the Christians in the villages, and in the long winter evenings gathering about him old and young to hear the great Bible stories. His life closed with the happy words : ' I am here, Lord ; I come.'

CHAPTER XIX

READERS AND LISTENERS

WHO would not be delighted to see even in imagination the innumerable places in which the Word of God is read day after day, and indeed night after night? In these pages only a few examples can be given, but they will carry the reader far away from home.

It was still in the days when the Bible Society's men journeyed in Siberia, whether in deep snow or amid tracts of summer wild-flowers, that a colporteur offered the Gospels at a nomad tent. 'Ah no!' was the answer, 'we are in the dark'; the people had never learned to read.

It would take long to tell all that the Society did for the illiterate in these islands of ours in the early years of the last century, and what it has done among populations scattered over the globe who had never dreamed of alphabet or sound-symbol, and who now read the Word of God in their native tongues.

For that more distressful darkness—the star-

less night of the Blind—the grants of the Society for the production of the Scriptures in embossed type began as far back as 1838, and to-day the Blind read the entire Bible in English and in Welsh, and complete portions of the Scriptures in nine European, three African, and twenty-two Asiatic languages. Whatever may be the form of speech in which the Book is made known to those 'in the dark' of the sightless, or 'in the dark' of the illiterate, men's hearts are lit up by the glory of the Cross and the joy of the Resurrection.

Some years ago in Canada a man was induced to buy a New Testament by a colporteur of the Montreal Auxiliary. He took it home, and his little daughter read it aloud at night by the light of the pine-knots. He and his wife and the young girl entered into a new life, happier and brighter than they had yet known. Long afterwards a family gathering of that couple, then grown old, was held in a larger home. They numbered one hundred and forty-two, and all of them who had reached the age of responsibility were professed Christians. Three had become missionaries, and three others were teaching in Christian schools.

Visiting the Manaar district, high up on the western side of Ceylon, a missionary saw groups

of illiterate men and women sitting around men and boys who were reading aloud to them from the Psalms and from St. Matthew. It was a sufficient sign that the colporteur had passed that way, and soon afterwards the missionary overtook the Bibleman as he was leaving the highway to reach a village through a lane flooded nearly waist-deep. Hereaway the scattered villages are peopled by Tamil Roman Catholics, who are forbidden by the priests to read the Gospel in their own tongue.

Another colporteur in the Jaffna district visited a 'Goldsmiths' village.' He entered twenty-two houses, and was kindly received in nearly all of them; and when he read the Scriptures and gave some explanations, the people listened attentively. Four goldsmiths bought a copy each of Proverbs; but when one of the four, opening the little book at chapter xi., read:

> 'A false balance is an abomination to the Lord:
> But a just weight is His delight,'

he flung the book from him as quite unsuited to his calling. Seven goldsmiths' women, however, readily bought seven portions for their children.

In 1907 a colporteur went to two Russian

villages north of the Volga Valley. He found no one there who was able to read. At one house the only occupant was an old woman. To his greeting she replied, 'Go away, my dear; I cannot read. The book would only lie on the shelf. If any one could read to me I would listen.' The colporteur asked if he might read to her. 'Yes, yes, my dear,' she said; 'sit down and I will hear you.' He read to her from the nineteenth and twentieth chapters of St. John, and the tears rolled down her wrinkled cheeks as she heard the story of the Lord's death and resurrection.

At Kamensky Fair, in the province of Perm, an old Russian woman hurried up to the colporteur, undid a knot in her handkerchief, and offered him a silver rouble for the New Testament. 'This is the third copy I have bought,' she said. 'Art thou able to read, little grandmother?' the Bibleman asked. 'No, but I get some one to read for me; and then after a time I give my reader the book. My readers will remember me when I am gone.'

In another village the colporteur came to a very poor hut, in which there were several women to whom he offered his books, but they were too poor to buy. 'Are any of you able to read?' he asked. 'Yes,' said one of the

women, pointing to a girl about fourteen years old. The colporteur opened a copy of the Four Gospels, and when he saw that she read with fair fluency, 'I will make you a present of this book,' he said, 'if you promise me to read it aloud to all here.' The promise was given gladly, and he left the hut 'with sounds of thanks in his ears.'

While in the camp at Mikhailovski, another Bibleman relates, several Tatars came and looked at his books, but they had no money. They were able to read Russian, and after testing their mastery of Russian, the colporteur gave them the Four Gospels. Later in the day he saw some ten of these men sitting round a comrade, who was reading one of the Gospels to them.

These incidents in Russia occurred a few years before the Great War; in God's good time, when men have learnt the consequences of a ruthless and blasphemous atheism, the like will happen again until the reign of Christ and His peace shall have been restored.

It was a poor Persian village of squalid hovels. The colporteur called upon the headman, and he readily brought the people together from the fields. They came in their scant,

torn, and dirty clothes, and as they sat on the ground the Bibleman spoke to them of the earthly life and the death of the Lord Jesus. They appeared scarcely to understand, made no remarks, asked no questions. To awaken their interest his assistant read aloud the Parable of the Sower, and the Bibleman explained it verse by verse. This was something they did know about. 'Yes, yes,' they said at the close, 'your Christ told the very truth.' The colporteur then went to the owner of the village, and offered him a Gospel. 'We have our own holy book, the Koran,' the men replied. 'Yes,' said the colporteur, 'but it is in a strange tongue, and you cannot understand it. This book you can understand, and it will tell you more of God than you can learn from the Koran.' 'But I cannot read at all,' he responded. 'Then how do you manage your village affairs?' 'I have a boy who reads and writes for me.' 'Good,' said the colporteur; 'buy these books, and get the boy to read them to you at night.' And the owner of the village bought two Gospels.

'Perhaps,' writes Mr. Church, Secretary for North India, from Allahabad, 'in no part of this vast empire has the Bible been given more prominence than it is given here. The

Hindi version is nearly the only book that the Christian converts use ; and I think I may say that most of the leading Hindus have the Hindi New Testament, which they read and compare with their own religious books. One of the Christians at Berenag on entering a high-caste village found the people sitting in a group, listening to the head-man, who was reading and expounding the Bible to them. For several years the people in one village were regularly visited by Colporteur Mahades Singh, who was originally a high-caste Hindu. He read the Bible to them with such happy effect that there is every hope of the whole village being won for Christ. By caste the people are *Tamtas*—" workers in copper and brass "—but they hold their own lands and houses. On my showing some Tibetans a New Testament in their own language,' adds Mr. Church, ' I was told that their *lamas* had a copy, and read it to the people during the summer nights in Tibet.'

A few years before the War a Bulgarian peasant bought a copy of the Gospels. On reaching home he opened it by chance at the fifth chapter of St. John, which he read aloud. His wife went to her sister and repeated the story of the cripple lying helpless beside the

Pool of Bethesda, and both of them returned and asked for other passages to be read to them. The sister told her husband, who also came to hear, and he spread the news of the wonderful book. The whole village was soon listening, and when the Bibleman came that way, each household gladly provided itself with a copy of the Gospels.

Writing of the Atlantic coast of Venezuela and the broad delta of the Magdalena River, Señor José M. Coll wrote : 'As in the time of our Lord, so to-day the simple unlettered people receive the Word with interest, and listen to the exposition of it with respect. Few can read with any fluency, many not at all, yet they purchase Gospels readily, some spelling out loud the hard words. Others put the books into their pockets to take home, where the children, better educated than themselves, will be their instructors. We know of several who have learned from the Bible to read.'

At San Cristobal, Venezuela, a father and son, named Ortega, bought from a colporteur the Gospel of St. John. They were so deeply impressed by it that they bought two hundred Gospels and gave them to their friends as they went about the country among herdsmen and cattle-dealers on remote farms. In many a

solitary hut, in many a farmstead, the son has read the Gospel to the inmates far into the night.

In north-west Hungary, before the War, the colporteur arrived at a pleasant and kindly village in which a family invited him to spend the Sunday with them for the reading of the Bible. He found the house full of men and women, who all listened most earnestly throughout the sitting. Before they separated, a proposal made by one of them that they should come together regularly in the same way, instead of spending the Sunday in the village inn, was at once agreed to.

Something similar happened in France, where for several days a colporteur shared a room at a hotel with a cloth-merchant. Only once or twice had the Bibleman knelt down at his bedside to pray when the merchant begged him to say his prayers aloud, and knelt down beside him. The next evening the merchant pleaded for a hymn ; and then the landlady interposed. She had heard the singing—and could they not have night prayers and a hymn for all in the house ? The Bibleman gladly consented ; read them that evening the incident of the Woman of Samaria ; and so family worship began.

In 1921 two Hindu immigrants in Natal heard of the Lord Jesus Christ from a Wesleyan Methodist evangelist. They desired to learn more of Him and of His sacrifice for all men, and as neither of them could read, they promised to pay a literate friend, named Murughan, to read to them the portions of Scripture which the evangelist had left with them. Avowed Hindu though he was, Murughan began to read. It mattered nothing to him what he read, so long as he was paid for his trouble. The next week he came again, and the others sat and listened and questioned, and strangely enough, his mind was unsettled by what the Scriptures contained.

Murughan decided to consult his father, an orthodox Hindu, who possessed Hindu sacred books, performed religious ceremonies, and took part in temple-worship. The result was not satisfactory. On the other hand, his mother, who, though illiterate, was a woman of strong character, promptly forbade him to have anything to do with Christian writings. The Gospels, however, had already taken such hold of the young man's spirit that when he next came to the reading he refused to accept any payment, and became himself an earnest student. The truth grew clearer and clearer,

all doubts vanished, and Murughan accepted Christ as his Saviour.

At home the devotion and joy with which he testified to his faith induced his father to lay aside his own sacred books and to follow his son's example. The mother, however, was inflexible, and bitterly lamented her son's apostasy until—suddenly, unexpectedly, almost incredibly—she beheld, as she herself averred, the Lord Jesus Himself in a vision, saw Him in a dazzling light, and distinctly heard Him calling to her. Every Sunday thereafter she with a second son walked three miles to the little mission church. She and her husband, together with Murughan and eight other persons, were subsequently baptized.

Far away in Java a colporteur and his assistant arrived at the village of Karangpasar, and went to the head-man for leave to remain there overnight. He asked them what they sold, and on answering him they read a chapter from one of the Gospels and explained it. He called his wife and his policeman to hear it, and when the chapter had been repeated the head-man not only bought a Gospel, but told the Biblemen to come in always and to come often. They acted on his invitation, and told the people of the Christian faith and of salvation

through the Lord Jesus Christ. The condition of the village was then reported to the missionary in Kalitjèrèt ; a native evangelist was sent, and meetings were held in the chief's house. Many people came to listen, for these Javanese houses are all open in front. The head-man and his wife professed their belief in Christ Jesus and asked for baptism.

The colporteur and his assistant had meanwhile journeyed on to Sidokoempoet, ' a village of which little good could be said.' The head-man and his councillors bought copies of the Scriptures, and began at once to read them ; and as in Java the natives usually read aloud, those who could not read listened to the Gospel story. They did not understand all that they either read or heard, but forty-five of them—men, women, and young people—went all the way to Kelitjèrèt to ask the Bibleman to teach them. When he had done all he could for them, he informed the missionary of what had taken place. These people of the ' village of which little good could be said ' put up a meeting-house, and every Sunday the missionary or his colleague visited them there for worship and instruction. These things happened in 1923.

During a tour in Orissa, Bengal, in Novem-

ber 1924, a missionary was held up for the night on the banks of the Mahanadi. 'Many cart-men,' he wrote, 'were held back because of the high water. Naturally we turned the conversation towards spiritual things. While we were talking, a trader who deals in curry, spices, and salt, and takes back rice from Orissa, suddenly arose and drew from his money-box the Gospel of St. John in Chattisghari. The corners of the book were worn from frequent use. He opened it and read John iii.—the conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus. It made a deep impression, and the tears were rolling down the cheeks of some. Never before did I realise so thoroughly the value and the need of the Scriptures and of Christian literature.'

Mr. P. L. Gillett of the Y.M.C.A., Nanking, tells how Chang, a Chinese soldier, owed his life to his habit of having with him the New Testament wheresoever he went. Chang was one of the 1450 men in the Army Department Bible Classes of the Association in the spring of 1924. He belonged to the brigade of General Kong, one of Marshal Chi's commanders, when these troops were falling back on Shanghai before the Mukden army. When the fighting had come to a pause, General

Kong sent Chang to make his way through the Mukden forces, and to bring back with him the personal belongings which the general had left at Soochow.

Chang was twice stopped by the enemy's guards, but his explanation was accepted, and he was allowed to proceed. The third time, however, he was not so fortunate. He was taken to the local headquarters. The general commanding was busy, and Chang was turned over to a subordinate, examined, and sentenced to death. He was stripped of his outer garments, which were thrown together on the floor, and taken out for execution.

A moment later the commanding officer entered the room, saw the clothes on the floor, and as he kicked them aside asked why they were allowed to lie there. His kick sent a small book flying from among the clothes. He picked it up : saw that it was the Testament ; was told that it belonged to a man just led out to death. A messenger was instantly sent to stop the execution and to bring the prisoner into the officer's presence.

Chang's life was spared, and in the end he was released. On his return to Nanking he reported his narrow escape, and added that the commanding officer was himself inter-

ested in Christianity. Among the cultured in China, Mr. Gillett observes, the very presence of the Scriptures among a man's possessions counts as a token of the owner's good faith and courage.

Many a year before these incidents occurred, two or three Eskimos in the sharp cold of Labrador were watching for a catch at a hole broken in the ice, and yet another was reading to them from the Gospel. In an instant, is not the day breaking over the Sea of Tiberias? There is a fire of coals on the shore, and a divine figure stands beside it. Simon Peter has cast himself into the sea, and the other disciples in the little boat are dragging to the beach the net full of great fishes, a hundred and fifty and three.

In Heo Shan ('Behind the Mountains') on the Mongolian border a Swedish missionary sold some thousands of Gospels and other portions among the shepherds and herdsmen, and time and again he saw them in the distance reading the books while they watched their flocks and cattle.

In Serbia a Bibleman came upon two boys herding swine in the great oak forests on the Turkish border, and each of them was busily reading the New Testament.

Pastor Ivan Gantcheff, the Society's Superintendent for north Bulgaria, gives a brief notice of 'the best Bible-seller in that country to-day,' Spas Stephanoff of Sofia. He is now four and fifty years old. When he was a shepherd-boy of ten he bought a New Testament from a Bibleman. Thinking it to be a priest's book, he chanted it verse by verse in priestly fashion, with the happy result that he was cured of what seemed to be an incurable habit of stammering. As he read and thought over the meaning of it all, and especially as he grew older, he pictured to himself the life of the Early Christians, and endeavoured to imitate it. The zeal with which the Gospel had been preached to others impressed him so deeply that at the age of thirty-four he gave up all other projects to undertake the work of the colporteur, to which he has devoted twenty years.

Early on a cold November morning the Rev. Dr. Zwemer observed in one of the streets of Cairo three urchins huddled together, with a robe drawn over them against the rain. What mischief might these little rascals be planning? As he stooped to lift the edge of the robe one of them was saying: 'And the Lord said to Abram, Get thee out of thy country.' 'What

are your names?' Dr. Zwemer asked. 'Ali, Muhammad, Hassan,' they answered. 'What are you doing here?' 'Reading; too early to begin work yet.' 'When do you come together?' 'Every morning.' 'Can *you* read?' 'No.' 'Can *you*?' 'No, but this one in the middle reads to us out of the book he bought at the house of the Bible Society.'

'I could not read God's Word,' said an old Korean woman, 'and I cannot tell you how heavy my heart was. I bought a Testament, and said to one of the Christian women, "Teach me to read this!" She replied, "Grandmother, you are seventy now, and too old to read; all you can hope to do is to go to Heaven just by believing." I went from one to another, but they all discouraged me, and said I was too old. At last I asked a little child to teach me the alphabet, and now my heart is refreshed.'

CHAPTER XX

'NEITHER STAFF NOR WALLET'

'FROM whom did you first hear the Gospel?' the missionary asked a Korean believer who applied to him for baptism. 'I heard it from St. Luke,' the Korean replied.

Not long ago that answer might have been taken as literally true by thousands of Russian peasants. As lately as seven years before the Great War a miner in one of the Siberian gold-camps on the Lena sought in vain on Easter Eve for a copy of the Gospels. 'As you know,' he explained, 'no Orthodox Christians should go to bed that night, but should wait until the dawn; and I was sleepy, but I wanted to keep awake and to read the Gospels too.' Without doubt he could have told the legend (which seems to have been a confused Russian tradition of the forty days of the Risen Life) that between Easter Sunday and Ascension Day our Lord and His Apostles wandered about the world.

When we find the lives of men completely changed through the reading of the Bible,

the New Testament, or some portion of Scripture, which has reached in some unknown way far-distant places among the mountains, in the jungle, on the edge of the desert, when we learn that unbelievers have been led to the truth by torn leaves, or by books thrown aside and forgotten, we feel that there is a very real sense in which they 'heard the Gospel' from one of the Evangelists or from our Lord Himself.

Writing in 1909, the Rev. W. Sherratt, the Bible Society's agent in Burma, told of a man living in a jungle village in the Pegu district, who held himself proudly aloof from the rest of the villagers. 'If so much as their shadow fell across his food, the food was thrown away. For he was a Brahman of the highest caste, and the haughty superiority of his Indian training had clung to him in the country of his adoption. Three years ago, by some means, a copy of one of the Gospels in his own language fell into his hands. On reading it he soon grew dissatisfied with the teaching of Brahmanism; the little book seemed to him to speak of a universal brotherhood and a common salvation. He sought and obtained a copy of the New Testament, then a Bible, and studied them earnestly. To-day that Brahman is a humble and devout believer in Jesus Christ.'

At Carácas, in Venezuela, a few years ago neither colporteur nor missionary could prevail on Señor Andres Key to purchase a Bible. At length, however, in hope of getting rid of these importunate evangelists, he did buy a copy, and at once dropped it into a portmanteau. There it lay for months until by one of those chances which recall Pope's familiar line,

'All chance, direction, which thou canst not see,'

he caught sight of the book. He picked it up, opened it, found to his surprise that it seemed to have some message for him, read it, and decided after much thought upon a change of life. He became a Bible Society colporteur in Venezuela. After three years of excellent service he applied himself to a course of clerical study, and in March 1924 was ordained to the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Carácas.

About twenty years ago a young man called at the Bible House, Montreal. 'What would you say this Bible is worth?' he asked an assistant with whom he was speaking. 'About fifty cents,' said the assistant, glancing at the book. 'You could not buy it from me for five hundred dollars,' rejoined the young man, and proceeded to tell the story of the volume:

'I had come up from Ottawa to Montreal

for a hockey match, and when the game was over I was going to the Windsor Hotel, but, somehow, I changed my mind and went to the St. Lawrence Hall. In my room there the first thing I saw was a Bible, but as I had no use for it I threw it aside. Next morning my eyes fell again on that book. I took it up. There was writing on the inside of the cover, advising the reader to search the book well, for it would be worth the trouble ; and there at the foot of the writing was the name of the writer—my father, who had died twelve years before. I hastened down to the office, saw the proprietor, who kindly let me have the book in return for another copy, and returned home with my treasure.'

Close upon sixty years ago a brief and exciting scene took place in a school in Bombay. For some reason or other a fiery-spirited Parsee scholar of about sixteen lost control of himself and knocked off the head-dress of his Brahman teacher. To give the lad time to cool and to think over the outrage he had committed, the principal locked him up alone in a room, returned to his own work, and soon forgot him. Some hours later he remembered his culprit. He found him absorbed in a gigantic New Testament which had been lying about in the

room, so enthralled indeed by the story of that divine life on earth, that the youth refused to leave unless he was allowed to take the book with him. That strong passionate nature responded quickly to the appeal of the Cross, and the time was not long before he determined to become a follower of Christ.

His family objected and threatened, but when they saw that his purpose was fixed, they had him set adrift in the Arabian Sea, in an oarless boat without food or water. So certain were they that he must have perished that they conducted his funeral service, and endeavoured to blot his name from remembrance. He was picked up, however, by a passing ship and brought back to Bombay, where for many a day the Government had to protect him from the Parsees who sought his life. Soon after this incident his mother died broken-hearted.

After many years had gone by, his family became reconciled to him, but they never ceased in their endeavours to win him back to the old religion. A short time before his death they offered to restore all the property which was rightfully his if he would recant. Years after his conversion, a Hindu, bearing a wreath of flowers, approached him one day on the street. 'I once threw a brick at you

here,' he said, 'but I am sorry now. You have won my respect. May I garland you?'

This high-hearted Christian left behind him a family of sons and daughters all eminent and successful in promoting the cause for which their father risked and sacrificed so much. In their lives and their work one sees the far-reaching influence of a single copy of the New Testament.

It happened sixteen years ago in Belgium that a doctor, calling on a patient, noticed a book beside her on the bed. 'What is your little book?' he asked 'It is my consolation,' she answered. 'Your consolation!' he said in some surprise; 'may I look at it?' After glancing over a few pages, he pressed her to lend it to him for a few days. 'Certainly,' she replied. He was in no hurry to return it, and some time afterwards, when she was well again, she asked him how much she owed him for his visits. 'Madam,' he said, 'I am quite satisfied with the book you lent me; your debt is more than paid.' 'It was a debt of thirty francs,' said the good woman as she told the colporteur what had occurred; 'so, you see, I must have another New Testament; it is my joy and my comfort.'

At the close of 'a Gospel-talk' one evening to the men in the Moorish Shelter in Tangier,

Morocco, a man came and sat down on the floor beside the chair of the speaker, Mr. Elson, of the Raymund Lull Home. '*Tabeeb*,' he said, 'all you have told us to-night is true. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and our Saviour.' Then he repeated story after story from the Gospels. How did he know all this, he was asked; had he been to the Shelter before? No, nor to the hospital, nor yet to the dispensaries. 'Many years ago,' he said, 'an old man, one of your people, came to our village and spoke to us, just as you spoke to-night, of *Sidna Aisa* (our Lord Jesus). When he went away he left a book with us. I have read it, and I know that Jesus Christ is my Saviour.' Upon inquiry it was made clear that the 'old man' was no other than Mr. William Mackintosh, the first agent of the Bible Society in Morocco (1883-1900). In his seventeen years of service there he distributed upwards of 81,000 copies of Scripture in more than a dozen languages, and before his time the Churches had scarcely turned their thoughts to Morocco.

During the war which the United States declared against Great Britain in 1812 two English officers, who had been the guests of an influential French-Canadian family named

Roy, presented their host on leaving with a copy of the New Testament as a token of their high esteem. The French gentleman's eldest son married, and moved to a farm at Sabrevois, on the Richelieu River, about thirty miles north-east of Montreal. He had taken the Englishmen's New Testament with him, and during the long winter he and his wife gave many evenings to the reading of it. They were convinced that it showed them the true way of the spiritual life, and in 1851 they were both received as members of the Anglican Communion in the church now known as Iberville.

They became the happy parents of twelve children, of whom three sons took Orders in the Church of England, and two daughters married clergymen. At a later date there were four grandsons who were also ordained, while various other members of the family have engaged in mission work. To-day, on the eastern bank of the Richelieu, a little church and parsonage commemorate the rise of the Sabrevois Mission, to which the first minister was appointed by Bishop Mountain in connection with this conversion, and which has given to the Church of England in Canada some of its best and ablest men both of the clergy and the laity.

After the burning of Bulgarian towns and villages during the Turkish atrocities in 1876

Dragan Burnazoff, a young man of Kotel, was one of the many homeless who had to seek a livelihood elsewhere. He found work in a village of Dobrudja with a large owner of sheep and cattle. Time passed heavily with him among the stock in the lonely fields until one day he noticed a large book on one of the shelves in the house. He took it out with him, and discovered a new world in the pages of the Bible. He knew nothing of Apostolic teaching or of an Evangelical Church, but he began to shape his life, as best he could, on what he learned from the Gospels.

Years afterwards he went to Varna, where he was received into the Methodist Church, and subsequently, when he had settled in Baltchik on the Black Sea, his home became a centre for the study of the Word of God and for many Christian undertakings. His eldest child, a daughter, after a distinguished school career at Lovatz, married a Bulgarian preacher; and Dragan Burnazoff, in his seventy-seventh year, is still working in the cause of religion.

About 1920, at Ahmednagar, in the Presidency of Bombay, an influential Mohammedan landowner, who for forty years had bitterly opposed Christianity, was admitted to baptism. During those long years he had studied the Scriptures, so that he might refute their teach-

ing and deny their authority. A little while before his baptism, however, he heard a voice which spoke to him almost in the words spoken centuries ago on the road to Damascus : 'How long are you going to be against me?' By a change of faith he hazarded social position and property, but he was not disobedient to the voice. He made the great surrender, and to-day, though suffering loss, he remains steadfast.

The Rev. M. T. Cerqueira, of the Baptist Church of Para, northern Brazil, who acts as the Bible Society's depositary, reported two years ago an interesting incident, to which we may some day hear a sequel. A woman, arranging some old books in her home, came across a Bible sold many years before to her husband by a colporteur. Through reading the book the woman and her daughter were converted. The Bible was then taken far away into the interior, and was there the means of turning into an earnest believer a great persecutor of the Gospel cause. It still remains in those distant places.

So to this day, in a very real sense, apostles and prophets are being sent forth to preach the Kingdom of God. The Bibleman often precedes the missionary, but again and again the prophet or the apostle has preceded the Bibleman.

CHAPTER XXI

THE RESURRECTION FLOWER

Again and again as one turns the pages of the Bible Society's Reports, one comes on the traces of old Bibles, Testaments, Gospels, which have been treasured by devout souls, or which seem to have been preserved by divine care for some future purpose.

In 1907 an aged man told one of the French colporteurs that he still had a New Testament given to him when he was a youth. 'Here it is,' he said, as he showed the colporteur the book. 'It looks very old,' said the Bibleman. 'Yes, and all those years it never left me; it went through the whole of our Crimean campaign.' Over half a century had then gone by since the fall of Sebastopol.

A year later a lady asked another French colporteur to wait while she sent for an old man who would be sure to buy. The old man came quickly: and as he looked at the New Testament which the colporteur handed to him, 'That 's it, right enough!' he said, and

told how a comrade of his, shot down under the walls of Sebastopol, begged one of them to take a book from his pocket and read it to him. 'I read to him till he breathed his last,' said the old soldier, 'and then I kept the book, for it contained the story of the Shepherd and a sheep which interested me. Afterwards I was myself badly wounded, and was for many days unconscious. When I came to, my little book had disappeared. I spoke about it to the sister in charge, but neither she nor any one else could give me any news of it. I was sorry it had gone, and often thought of it, for I had no notion where another copy could be had, or indeed whether it was still printed. I have often told this Crimean story to my neighbours, and that is how this lady sent for me when she saw in your book that passage about the Shepherd. *C'est bien ça!* and I am glad you came.'

'I have had a Bible seventy years,' said an old man to a third colporteur. 'I was quite a child when my parents, who were Catholic, allowed me to read a copy which they bought from a colporteur. All through my life that book has been my guide, so that I am no longer a Catholic; nor am I a Protestant; I am a follower of the Bible.'

Yet another French colporteur speaks of a

lady, eighty-four years of age, who said to him, 'Until I was twelve we had no Bible in the house, but as I was very anxious to have one, I persuaded father and mother to sell a pet lamb which had been given me, and to buy me a Bible out of the money.'

In a town in Rumania about this time a colporteur found two old Bibles which had been diligently read, and the reading of which had converted many people. 'I was received most cordially,' he wrote, 'and Bibles and Testaments were bought. A young inn-keeper used to read to his guests, and a veteran believer explained what was read, if any difficulty arose.'

Miss Mellet of the North Africa Mission tells how while she was visiting in Sifroo a countrywoman came in and asked to see the Nazarene woman who knew the words of Christ. Miss Mellet greeted her, but proceeded with her discourse. She noticed, however, that the stranger appeared quite familiar with the narrative of the Gospel.

'You understand, I suppose,' Miss Mellet said to her, 'that I am speaking not so much about *our* Lord Jesus as of *my* Lord Jesus.'

'Yes,' she answered, 'for He is *my* Lord Jesus too.'

'How is that?' Miss Mellet inquired; 'you are quite a stranger to us? Who has taught you?'

'Yes, I am a stranger, and I have never seen a Nazarene's face before. But some years ago a man passed through our country and left a book with my father, who read it to us. It told of Jesus the Saviour, and my father believed. He died trusting in Him, and I too am trusting in Him.'

The man who sold the book may have been a native trader who had bought copies for merchandise.

In one of the Canary Islands a colporteur was gladly welcomed by the mistress of a house at which he asked for a drink of water. 'You have the Holy Scriptures, have you not?' she said, and invited him to rest a while. She told him how she had bought, out of curiosity, a Gospel which a woman was about to burn. She and her husband used to read the little book in the moonlight, and the villagers would often draw near and listen to the beautiful story. No one could understand how the priest could call it a bad book. One day the sacristan came and asked her to give it up. She refused. The priest then asked for the loan of it, and promised to return it; but she had

never seen it again. Now she could have the holy books which they loved.

While a Bibleman of the United Free Church of Scotland Nagpur Mission was at work in a country town of Bengal, a number of low-caste men from Dhapawada, a village several miles away, bought copies of the Scriptures. The following year, on hearing of his return, they came and told him that they had been reading their books together. They were convinced that the doctrine was from God, but they were ignorant people, and they begged him to come and teach them. As the result of his visits fifteen persons received baptism. Bitter persecution followed their profession of Christianity. Unhappily there was no resident teacher to encourage the young converts in their resistance. They yielded at length to the pressure of caste and returned to Hinduism ; and thenceforth all intercourse between Dhapawada and Nagpur ceased.

After the lapse of many years, during which the Mission had developed its educational work, the Rev. John Douglas was set apart for the evangelising of the villages around Nagpur, and in 1892 he visited Dhapawada with his catechists. He preached to a large crowd, and

in the course of the meeting an old grey-haired man on the outskirt was pointed out to him. 'That is one of your Christians,' he was told. He got in touch with him, and accompanied him to his house, where the old man (Arjuna was his name) brought out the Scriptures, with yellow and tattered leaves, which he had treasured for thirty years. He confessed his weakness and desertion, but he declared that he had never lost faith in the Saviour.

From Arjuna Mr. Douglas heard of Sakharam, another of the old Christians. On his way to the village where Sakharam lived, he fell in with a carpenter who knew this old believer. Sakharam certainly was not a worshipper of idols, but what the name of his God was, the carpenter did not know. In his house there was a room in which he kept a book, and every Sabbath (*Aditwar*) he would shut himself in and read the book and worship his God. The old man welcomed Mr. Douglas with great joy, and they spent a happy time in speaking of spiritual things, and in prayer.

This second attempt at Dhapawada met with much opposition, but the relief and sympathy of the Nagpur Mission during an outbreak of disease and a time of famine encouraged the old believers to return, and helped to

win a number of the new generation. Among these last, the first to be baptized was a grandnephew of Arjuna, and he was one of the earliest lads to join the Dhapawada school.

In 1908, in a town in the east of Minas Geraes, Brazil, died an old man, Claudio Alves Fernandez, to the great regret of the people. To them he had long been 'Uncle Claudio.' Years back he had come into possession of a Bible, which he studied earnestly until the clear light of the Gospel shone upon him. He then began to make known the sacred doctrine to those around him. News of this new movement spread; teachers were sent to the place; a minister followed, and at once thirty of the townspeople were admitted to church fellowship. At the time of 'Uncle Claudio's' death there was a congregation of five hundred. The Rev. Annival Nora, on visiting the place, received among the latest converts a desperate gambler and drunkard who had become a fervent believer through reading the Scriptures.

Similar incidents occurred about the same date at Arcos, close to the River San Francisco, and, many a league away, at Ibituruna in the district of São Jão del Rei. In the last instance the old gentleman had purchased a large

plot of ground in Ibituruna, so that as soon as things were ready the people might have a house of prayer.

Even by a drifted leaf men have found the tree.

A young Armenian employed in a chemist's shop in Ibraila on the Danube observed that leaves were torn out of an old book to wrap drugs in. He took some of them to read, and when he discovered that they belonged to a book of which he had heard, he asked if he might have all that remained. The chemist refused and told him that the book was bad, and that it was a sin to read it. Happily, however, it was not long before a colporteur visited Ibraila, and the young man was able to buy a Bible of his own.

In 1912 a Persian Mullah came to the Bible Society's depot at Teheran in quest of the Gospel of St. Matthew. He explained that while studying religious law the question had arisen in his mind, What could be the beliefs of the nations which had no Koran? Ascending one day to the roof of the house, he found three leaves of a book lying about, and on taking them up he saw the words *Injili Mattha* (Gospel of Matthew). He read them over and over; he would have been glad to keep them, but

he was afraid, and he laid them down where he found them. Now, however, on his return to Teheran he was resolved to see the whole book. The colporteur handed him a copy, opened it at his request at the third to the fifth chapter, which contained what he had read on the torn leaves. The Mullah sat down, read and meditated for about two hours, and after putting a mark in the book asked that it should be taken care of until he returned. For ten days in succession he came back, and asked many questions on points that were not clear to him. At length he said, 'In my present position I cannot take this book home ; I must come here sometimes to read it, waiting for religious freedom. I thank God for having fulfilled the desire of my heart.'

'Is yours a genuine Bible?' a colporteur was asked on entering a brick-maker's house in Belgium fifteen years ago. 'Yes, madam.' 'Then I must have it at whatever cost,' said the mistress of the house. 'Some days ago my husband found on the road four leaves of a torn Bible—part of the book of the Prophet Amos. See, here they are,' and she showed him the leaves, which had been well thumbed. She was delighted at having got the book and at the thought of her husband's surprise and

pleasure. Three months later the colporteur was helping at the Gospel Hall at Hoboken when a master-joiner and five workmen came in from a thirteen-mile walk to ask for copies of the Bible ' of which they had heard.' They explained that they had seen the Bible of the brick-maker who had found the pages of the Book of Amos, and they had got his address which he had left when he sold that copy. So they had come to get ' the truth ' for themselves.

In some parts of Shantung it is the Chinese women who throng to the temples on the great festivals, and some of these devotees buy portions of the Scriptures as safe receptacles for shoe-patterns at home. Strange to say, in one village sixteen or seventeen years ago a husband noticed one of these pattern-holders, found it to be the Gospel of St. John, and read the book, with the result that he and a number of his friends became Christians.

How slight a touch may turn our careless steps into the right way. In a café at Bahia Blanca, the Argentine, three years ago, a young man approached a colporteur and took up a copy of St. Luke's Gospel. ' Well, that is strange ! ' he said ; ' that 's my Christian name.' He picked up another Gospel. ' *Mark* ! ' he exclaimed, ' why, that 's my

family name.' The coincidence struck him as so curious that he bought both Gospels.

The spiritual vitality, the radiant influence of these torn leaves and old books discoloured with the dust of years, remind one of the cruciform flower which was placed in the hands of the Christian dead in the early centuries in Egypt. It is a desert plant which lies withered and dry, or is blown about over the sand, but which starts into life and breaks into blossom on the slightest contact with moisture. So, however dead men may be to grace, when ' God gives of the dew of heaven,' these Scriptures, revealing the glory of the Cross, are the true cruciform Resurrection Flower.

CHAPTER XXII

AMONG THEMSELVES

Let us turn for a little while to the people, and take note of their sayings and doings among themselves.

In Turkish Arabia about a dozen years ago a Moslem girl asked a colporteur for the Story of Christ and the Virgin Mary. He gave her a copy of the Four Gospels, which she at once opened and began to read. Two Moslems were standing near, and one of them said to her :

'Are you becoming a Christian that you read the *Injil* (the Gospel) ?'

'Are you Moslems ?' the girl inquired in winning tones.

'Praise God, we are,' they answered proudly.

'What does the word *Moslem* mean ?' asked the girl.

They looked at her, and they looked at each other, but neither replied.

Now the word *Moslem* means *true believer*, as the girl told them, and she quoted from the Koran the passages which prescribe belief in Christ and the acceptance of the Scriptures.

The men listened in astonishment to this Girl-Mullah of about twelve years of age, and what she said induced them to buy the Book of Genesis and the Gospel of St. John.

In a Burmese village, a year or two ago, boys were plaguing a Bible-seller. An elder of the village interposed. 'Do not jeer at him,' he said to them. 'Where are *our* preaching monks? Our Pali Scriptures, who can understand them? But these books, they preach their message in language that a child can understand.'

When several Moors of the better class were conversing in the depot in Tangier, Morocco, one of them declared earnestly to his companions: 'Though all must admit that there is much good advice given in the Koran, it cannot be compared to the Old and New Covenants, for as you read the *Injil*, you seem to feel that a living Person is in it, drawing you to Him.'

In a Rumanian village, before the Great War, a colporteur found that there was no ready money among the people. The schoolmaster, however, came forward and bought the whole stock of Scriptures on the promise of the villagers to pay him when the harvest was over.

At Vicién, in the province of Huesca, Spain, so determined were the people not to part with their Bibles and Testaments that the priest wrote in desperation to the Bishop for directions. The Bishop, who was himself an earnest Bible scholar, and who, while canon of Saragossa Cathedral, had seen a good deal of Evangelicals, replied :

'Do not trouble to deprive your parishioners of the books bought from the Protestants, for they will not find any unsound doctrine in them. Would to God that those who obtain such books would acquire the Christian spirit which they contain ! Neither should you molest the vendors of such publications, for they are only doing their duty. See to it that you fulfil yours as faithfully.'

In a café on the banks of the Tigris a colporteur offered a Hebrew Testament to a Jew. 'Throw it into the river,' said the Jew as he looked at it in cold dislike.

'O Jew,' broke in a Mullah, sitting close by, 'are you not seeking for the Messiah, who came and who ascended into heaven, and who will come again ? I have read the Holy Book often, and have profited thereby. How much more do you need to read and learn the truths of the *Injil*.'

The Mullah then turned to an army officer who was with him. 'O Effendi,' he said, 'truly I tell you that I have many and great blessings from the *Injil*, such blessings as I have never received from the Koran.' On hearing these words, the Jew said, 'I am ashamed,' and taking the Mullah's advice, he bought a French Bible.

In Spain, in spite of the general opposition of the Church of Rome, and often of the violence of the priests, one hears of the Bibleman reading and explaining the Scriptures in an inn or a private house far into the night on the invitation of the inhabitants. At Iberhernando, a village in the province of Carceres, copies of the New Testament were so closely studied that a request for instruction was sent by about a hundred villagers to the Bible Society's agent at Madrid. They were visited by a missionary, and so many gathered to hear him that his meetings had to be held in the open field. Two years later the villagers were contributing towards the support of a schoolmaster-evangelist who was about to settle among them.

In one of the western provinces of France two young men bought each a Testament from a colporteur, and at once sat down outside the house to read. After the colporteur

had passed down the long street in which they lived and come back again, he found each still reading. Two hours later he saw one of them in company with another family, who sat listening to him as he read aloud. This book was a joyous light which no neighbourly man would hide under a bushel.

Two curious incidents were noted a number of years ago by a member of the Batala Mission in the Panjab. In one village, about twenty miles from Batala, the Scriptures were offered for sale after the missionaries had finished preaching. A religious leader of the Sikhs was standing in the foreground among the audience, and the people called on him to buy a Gospel, insisted on his buying. 'We feed you,' they said, 'so that you may make known to us the Word of God. It is said that the Gospel is His Word ; buy a copy and read it to us, so that we may know whether it is the Word of God or not.'

Another religious leader in an adjoining village was heard reading a Gospel to the people. He explained to the missionaries that wherever he went he read not only the Granth Sahib (the sacred book of the Sikhs) but the Gospel as well.

A night or two later this 'man of the Granth'

came to the mission tent to inquire about Christianity. At the close of the conversation he spoke of the risk he ran. 'Send me away,' he said, 'I cannot confess Christ here, and live.' Whether he had been followed in the dark by a spy could not be discovered, but the people had heard of his visit, and on the missionaries asking after him they were told that he had gone, but no one could say whither.

It is difficult to realise in a land where belief is free the tragic issue suggested by that sudden disappearance; yet again and again the experience of the Bibleman abroad contains not merely suspicion but clear evidence of the extremes to which fanaticism may go. In a Persian town in 1923 a colporteur had a long talk with three Sayids ('descendants of the Prophet').

'This man,' said one of them, referring to the colporteur, 'speaks with reason, and in his arguments there is more truth than in ours, for we argue without proofs.'

'Do you also believe then in three Gods?' asked one of the others. 'If so, you are an apostate, and we will not sit with you.'

The first Sayid prayed aloud for himself and his companions, and left them; whereupon the other Sayids turned fiercely on the Bibleman.

'It is the devil,' they said, 'who puts into your mouth the words you have spoken. Begone and do not let us see you again among Moslems, or it will be ill for you.'

Shortly afterwards the colporteur met the first Sayid. 'Stand firm,' said 'the descendant of the Prophet,' 'and be not troubled if you have to suffer reproach and insult. As for me, I have accepted your words as true, for if I do not accept the truth I shall be fighting against God.' He then bought a Bible, and when he was asked if he would give his name, his only answer was, 'A slave of God.'

In May 1909 in the hill-country of southern Rajputana shocks of earthquake aroused the wildest superstition among the people. What did these tremblings of the hills mean? they asked each other. What evils were coming upon them? What could they do to appease the unseen powers and save themselves? Messengers were sent from village to village to bring together the men of wisdom, the *Gurus*—teachers and religious guides of the people. Among those summoned was a *Guru* named Chimman who had come under the influence of a Christian lady, and she had taught his boy to read.

At the appointed place four hundred people assembled, and there were fifty *Gurus* of repute in attendance. For seven hours these men of wisdom gave their opinions and advice. At length Chimman was called upon to speak. Rising up in his place, he said : ' I cannot read well, but my boy has with him the Book of God, and he will read to you.'

Then the lad, who was but thirteen years old, stood up before the people, opened his Bible, and read in the Hindi version the words of our Lord in the twenty-first chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke, wherein He tells of the signs and sights which must come to pass before the Son of Man appears with power and great glory.

A hush fell upon the people as the boy read. Then some one said, ' Chimman, you can pray. Pray to Jesus Christ for us.'

Chimman raised his voice in prayer, while Hindu and Moslem bent their heads in reverence : ' Jesus, Lord, have mercy on us, wash us in Thy precious blood, make us fit to stand with Thee, accepted in Thy kingdom of righteousness and peace.'

Colporteur Wong had almost reached the market-town of Kailongshui in the Hongkong

Agency when he met a well-dressed man with whom he fell into conversation. Pausing under the shade of a great tree, he spoke to him of his mission and of the nature of the books which he was selling, and offered him a Gospel, which the stranger readily bought. Some hours later, when Wong was in the market-place addressing the people and showing them the Scriptures, the stranger appeared. He bought a number of Gospels and distributed them to those around him. 'Take them,' he said, 'and read them. They are telling us of a Jesus who suffered for us, and who died that we might have life everlasting. Good news indeed—such as few of us have heard before.'

During a tour among the villages in Annam the Society's agent and an assistant were cordially received by a Tri-phu (a Prefect) who invited them to tea and refreshments. He had been giving an audience to two Annamese notables. After buying for himself a Bible and a copy of Genesis he turned to his visitors: 'And are you buying nothing?' he asked.

'I have forgotten my spectacles, great Mandarin,' replied one. 'I have no money with me,' said the other.

Without a word the Prefect passed his own spectacles to the first, and lent the other what

money he needed. Whereupon they each bought several books.

'Good men of Lima (Peru),' cried a loud-voiced friar, pressing his way into a crowd, 'you ought not to read this forbidden book. The Church condemns it, and even dying Protestants call for the priests of Holy Mother Church that they may confess to them.'

At that moment a party of officers came up, and four or five of them bought Testaments from the colporteur. Holding up his Testament before the friar, one of them declared in a loud voice: 'This book contains the truth, and that is the reason why I buy it.'

The friar made no attempt to reprove the officers, and others in the crowd obtained copies amid a confusion of voices, some shouting '*Viva la religion*,' and others, 'Away with this mad friar!'

It is not in Spain alone that the Romanist clergy and their bishops hold different opinions as to the 'Forbidden Book.' Two Austrians who had bought Bibles and were suddenly assailed by doubts decided to consult their priest whether it was lawful to read them. The books were Allioli's version, the most popular Roman

Catholic German Bible; but after looking through them, the priest handed them back with the warning: 'These books are false; as good Catholics you must not read them. Return them, and get your money back.'

The men came upon a friend in the street, and all three approached the colporteur and asked him to take back his books as they were false and return them their money. 'Prove to me that my books are false,' said the colporteur, 'and you shall have twice your money.' They thought of another priest, who might help them with proofs. His reverence turned over the pages, compared them with the Vulgate, and stroked his chin in perplexity. 'They may be right,' he said, 'but in any case they have no notes. The best thing you can do is to go to his Eminence the Bishop; he will guide you.'

The good old Bishop received them graciously, and after a brief examination said to them in a fatherly way: 'Yes, these books are correct and good; read them carefully.' 'But, your Eminence,' said one of the men, 'must not the Bibles which Catholics read have notes?' 'Notes,' replied the Bishop, 'are for priests, not for the laity.' The men thanked him, and returning again to the col-

porteur apologised to him, with the result that he was able to dispose of several other copies.

Even in Italy popular fanaticism seems to ignore the attitude of the Sovereign Pontiff himself. In 1921 a Bibleman had just sold a New Testament to a woman in Naples when a Franciscan friar came up and asked what she had bought. No sooner had he seen the book than he exclaimed, 'Give it back!—these books are excommunicated. And you,' turning to the Bibleman, 'how dare you sell books without a permit?'

The Bibleman produced his licence. 'I do not mean that,' said the friar; 'where is your permit from the *Curia* (the ecclesiastical court)?' 'I have no need of it,' replied the Bibleman; 'in making known Him whom all must confess to be the Lord, we are but doing our duty.' 'It is not through you but through us that the world is to know that,' rejoined the friar. 'It may be so,' said the Bibleman, 'but you are not doing it.'

Then the woman spoke: 'That is true. Last December his Holiness the Pope said that if the peoples wished for the blessing of God they must turn to the Gospel. But neither priest nor friar has ever given me this book, or shown me where it is to be bought; nor do they wish

me to read it. Now I have got it, I am not going to give it up ; I shall study it attentively.' All that the friar could say was : ' I shall pray to St. Francis of Assisi and to our God and the Madonna that you may repent.'

A striking incident took place some years ago in the mosque of Ashar, a populous suburb of Basra. A Turkish gentleman rose and asked permission to address the throng of worshippers after the Friday prayers. Leave was granted, and he explained that he had bought a copy of the Turkish New Testament, and had been reading the history of Paul the Apostle. ' If,' he concluded, ' a glimpse of the living *'Isa* (Jesus) could transform a Jew so bigoted as Saul of Tarsus, it behoves us also to obtain a glimpse of Him.'

At Kerkuk in Turkish Arabia a colporteur, standing near a shop, offered the Scriptures to two young students of the Military School. They each chose a Gospel, and were about to pay for them when the shopkeeper, a Moslem, interposed. ' My friends,' he said, ' such books as these are not for you, and you will be better without them.' Whereupon they returned the Gospels and went their way.

' May I ask,' the colporteur said, ' why you

advised these young men not to buy these books?' 'Certainly,' the Moslem replied; 'these books might have unsettled their religious belief. They are but young yet, of no real judgment; and indeed they could scarcely understand the meaning of much that they might read. With a man as old as myself it is different; I could not be either unsettled or harmed by the books.' The colporteur accordingly offered him the Scriptures, and he bought a Turkish Bible.

Not long afterwards, as the colporteur was passing the shop, the Moslem bought a Bible in Arabic. If the colporteur did not smile at that sudden spell of the Divine Word, surely the angels did.

The evening was closing in, and a Bible-man was leaving an entirely Roman Catholic village in Belgium, when he noticed outside a window an open book with a slip of paper on which was written: 'You are kindly requested to read this.' He saw at a glance that the book was a copy of the Gospels and Acts which he had sold that day, and that it was open at a chapter of St. Luke. He knocked at the door, and asked if he might know why they had placed the book outside on the window-

ledge with that invitation. ' Because it is so beautiful,' he was told, ' and we wanted others to read it also.'

And once again one seems to hear still singing the voice which sang centuries ago : ' Take it and read it.'

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HEM OF HIS GARMENT

SELDOM has the power of the Gospel and the need for its circulation in the mother tongue been more signally displayed than they have been in the last quarter of a century among the aboriginal tribes scattered over the mountainous tracts of the south-western provinces of China.

Here at home we had scarcely become aware of the existence of these primitive peoples before the Centenary of the Bible Society; but the China Inland Mission had already come in contact with them on the upper reaches of the Yangtse River; itineration had begun in Hunan in 1875; two years later there was an Inland missionary in Kweichow, and in 1881 two were stationed in Yunnan, 'the Cloudy Region of the South.'

The appointment of an agent to the south and south-western provinces completed in 1886 the Bible Society's division of the empire into three vast districts; and in that year the

missionary prospect was brightened by the arrival of an ardent and gifted colleague, the Rev. Samuel Pollard of the Bible Christian Mission (afterwards merged in the United Methodist Mission).

So far evangelisation had been a slow and difficult task. The Mandarin version gave access to the Chinese population, but among the tribal masses, who were dour and distrustful, there were comparatively few who had any knowledge of Mandarin, and there was no written form of their own speech. Mr. Pollard devised a script which was quickly and easily learned ; an outline of the life of Christ, the Lord's Prayer, and various hymns were translated into Hwa Miao, printed and put into circulation ; and a swift awakening followed. In 1898 the first candidates for baptism were enrolled, and in 1900 large numbers of tribesmen trooped to the China Inland missionaries to learn more of this wonderful teaching. In June that year the Boxer Rising, with its outrages and ferocious massacres, swept through the provinces, and the work in Kweichow and Yunnan was broken up.

When the missionaries returned in 1901, it appeared that only a few score of believers had remained faithful ; yet suddenly, to their sur-

prise, there were signs of what proved to be an astonishing revival. The tribesmen who listened to them readily believed, and felt that they must make known to others what they had heard. 'It is not good,' said an old man in Kweichow, 'to keep such good news to ourselves; let us go and tell our kinsmen in Lang-long-ch'iao'; and the men of that village carried in turn the news to the Ta-Hwa-Miao (the Great Flowery Miao) at Weiling-chow, several days' journey into the north-west.

Some time after the Boxer Rising the Rev. James Adam, the earliest of the Inland missionaries in these parts, was in a village through which a band of Miao hunters were passing on their way home. He invited them to his table and spoke to them earnestly of the life and death of our Lord. They pressed him to come to their mountain village, where, on their return, they told their friends and neighbours of all they had heard of Jesus Christ. So a new field was prepared for the Gospel.

There was a considerable increase too in the number who were endeavouring to master the Mandarin New Testament. 'St. John,' wrote a missionary, 'is a favourite Gospel, and many of the men know chapters of this book by heart. Just imagine you hear them repeating: "He

came unto His own, He came unto His own . . . His own received Him not. . . . As many as received Him, as many as received Him . . . to them gave He the power to become the sons of God, the sons of God, the sons of God." Just think of it! These people, despised, oppressed, so poor in this world's goods, such a manifestation of God's sovereign grace!'

Meanwhile Mr. Pollard, at Chaotung in north-east Yunnan, was busy translating with the help of a Chinese pastor and Miao tribesmen, for, as he was convinced, 'We must have our own Scriptures. We cannot have a steadfast Church without the Word of God.' It was no easy undertaking. Here, as among other primitive people, not only did he find many simple moral and spiritual conceptions quite unknown, but the right words for common expressions often gave one pause. Who could have expected trouble with 'Thy Kingdom come' in the Lord's Prayer? But none of the Miao had ever heard of a time when they had a *kingdom*, and none knew of any word that could convey its meaning. 'Thy heavenly home come' was the nearest equivalent they could discover.

On the eve of the Bible Society Centenary Mr. Edward Amundsen, who had served some

years in the Inland Mission, was appointed the Bible Society's sub-agent for Kweichow and Yunnan, with a view to developments on the borders of Tibet, and along the trade-routes to Burma. Preceded by long strings of coolies laden with a stock of Scriptures, he and his wife reached Yunnanfu, ' the proud capital of the South-West ' in May 1904.

They were heartily welcomed by the missionaries, and the Chinese showed themselves kindly. The depot in their compound proclaimed itself in gold characters ' Fa-Fu-Ti ' (*Happiness Dispatch Office*), and at either end of the sign appeared the inscription ' British and Foreign Bible Society, established in the year thirteen of Chia-ch'in.' Work was inaugurated with prayer and with a festal gathering of representative men and women of the neighbourhood ; and Mr. Amundsen set out on a tour through the groups of villages and homesteads within a radius of a hundred miles.

At this date in Yunnan, with its eleven and a half millions of people, the C.I.M. had 19 workers and the United Methodist Mission 12, but there were not yet quite 150 church members. In Kweichow, with its seven and a half millions, 20 Inland missionaries occupied 6 stations and reported 123 communicants.

We were now coming to a clearer knowledge of this large intermingled population. As to the Chinese, it need only be noted that they belonged to a variety of sects—Moslem, Confucianist, Taoist, Buddhist. The Miao, some forty or fifty thousand people, had occupied the fertile plains to the north centuries ago, but the Chinese—the 'Guest People,' as they were almost ironically called—had come in hordes, had fought them and driven them into the mountain fastnesses. Clans of an ancient race, each speaking a dialect of its own, they lived under feudal chiefs tributary to the Mandarins, and were named from their various costumes the Flowery, the White, the Black Miao.

They were not the only aborigines. The more warlike No-su, numbering from three to five millions, had never been subdued, and acknowledged no rulers but their own. They occupied the region between the Ta Liang Mountains and the Kin-Sha River, named Lolo-land after one of their mighty leaders. In touch with them were their kinsfolk, the Laka, the Lisu, and the Kopu. Some years later Mr. Amundsen estimated that in the province of Yunnan alone there were from thirty-five to forty racial tribes, speaking many different languages.

Mr. Amundsen's long journeys gave many glimpses of the surroundings of these primitive people—the labyrinth of picturesque mountains ; the long climbs to plateaux ten thousand feet above sea-level ; the miserable huts in almost inaccessible places, for the most despised and oppressed of the tribesmen took to the heights ; the great slopes coloured with azaleas and rhododendrons ; the rice-fields in the valleys ; the deep and rocky gorges ; the forests through which the traveller needed Lolo spearmen for escort from village to village ; the rushing rivers on which distance was reckoned in whirling rapids—and agent, missionary, and boatmen had to count on three of these in every mile or two.

Week after week brought more uplifting evidences of the awakening of the people to a new life and hope. Hundreds of the Miao came down from their mountain abodes to the U.M.M. station at Chaotung. Another band, 'who had possibly done a day's journey or more,' was met on its way southward to an Inland meeting at Sapushan. Hundreds of Chinese Gospels, too, had been circulated among the tribes, and in many places the villagers in their eagerness to learn were paying Chinese teachers to instruct them.

Even from Lolo-land No-su had travelled to Chaotung, all wanting Gospels, as they intended to have Chinese teachers over for reading-lessons in Mandarin. It was a remarkable change, for the No-su were the most ruthless of raiders. They carried off Chinese men, women, and children, sold them as slaves, used them for all sorts of labour, turned them into workers in silver and copper, into blacksmiths, carpenters, masons, and generally kept them in bonds lest they should escape. A few months later a Mr. Wang who had become a Christian was preaching among the No-su and attempting a rough version of a Gospel in the language.

The great event of 1907 was the arrival of Mr. Pollard's version of St. Mark in Hwa Miao. The first load of eight hundred copies was immediately bought up; as fast as the books came, the people hastened to obtain them, and in a little while the number who could read them had rapidly increased, and the Gospel was used at evening prayers. The Gospel of St. John followed in 1908, and was hailed with joy.

A modified system of colportage had been adopted. Christian tribesmen, supported by the Society, travelled through the country, staying for a week at each village to teach the script

to the newly baptized, and to proclaim to the people the ' good news ' contained in the books which they offered for sale. Here and there they met with opposition, had difficulty in obtaining shelter or in buying food, but the number of Christians was considerable, and village after village was yielding to the appeal of the Gospel.

In the olden days the Fifth of the Fifth Moon had been, and was still, a Hwa Miao holiday, and great crowds gathered on some appointed hill for barbaric music, singing, and dancing. Now the Christians trooped to Chaotung for sacramental and other services. In 1909 there were three thousand. The village was thrown open ; every house was packed ; and not a few slept gladly in their felt capes on the bare ground. Poor as they were, the Hwa Miao connected with the Inland Mission in Kweichow collected an offering of twenty *taels* (£2, 7s.).

Nothing could be more cheering than the progress made among those people. Like the Eskimo in Labrador, the Red Indian in Canada, the South Sea islander, the Miao loved his book, read it as he toiled up the mountain with his load, took it on a journey, treasured it in his bosom or in his rug. ' The Gospel,' wrote a missionary, ' is making new men and women

of hundreds of them. We are glad to be in the work and to have your hearty help.'

In 1907 Kweichow had been transferred from this sub-agency, and Mr. Amundsen was free to extend his efforts into the vast mountain regions: regions swarming in the north-west with Chinese, Tibetans, No-su, Minja, Moso, and Lisu, all friendly, all ignorant; swarming, too, in the south-east with Chinese intermingled with non-Chinese tribes. He and his assistant, En Chung, preached and sold many thousand Chinese Gospels. An old man was so firmly convinced that the books contained goodness and truth, that he brought two thousand *cash* for portions which he intended to circulate among the people and so 'obtain merit.'

Movable type, cast in England for the Miao script, was sent out to Yokohama, and an additional three thousand copies reached Yunnan in 1910, but the demand was still so great that another edition was put to press.

An incident at this time proved the sterling quality of the faith of the Hwa Miao. In a village a long day's journey from Sapushan a man who had been helped by one of the Scripture 'readers' refused to pay his landlord a few *cash* towards the cost of idol-worship. He was chained up and his life was threatened, but he

broke away and escaped to the Inland Mission Station. He was escorted back by a ' reader,' who was sent to help him and the other Christian believers, who were urged to put their trust in God.

The Gospel of St. Matthew was added to the Miao version in 1912, and progress was being made with other portions. From the Hwa Miao the light had passed to the large tribe of the Lisu in an adjoining territory, and great success attended the mission work among them. The hearts of the Laka tribe too had been stirred, and in this same year (1912) St. Mark in Laka and St. Matthew in Lisu left the press ; colporteur-readers and missionary were abroad in the villages teaching little groups late into the night to read the printed characters. Even the children had been attracted, and lads gathered pine-sticks so that they and the girls might have light to learn to read.

The Kopu tribe, between fifteen and twenty thousand people, high up on the mountain slopes, had been aroused to interest. They had no idols of wood or stone, but they worshipped trees, boulders, and water-spirits, lived in dread of demons, and seemed to be in bondage to everything wicked and immoral. They professed belief, however, in ' One,' a Supreme

Being, whom they named *Ie-su-mu*, and who was not evil-minded. On these mountain slopes and in outlying Kopu homesteads visited by Miao Christians, the people were eager to have the Gospel in their own tongue, and in 1913 gladly bought up most of the first edition of ten thousand copies of the Kopu St. Mark on its arrival, and heartily welcomed the 'reader' on his weekly visits to village after village.

Among the unconquered race in Lolo-land the Chinese Gospels had already brought many to the feet of Christ. But these Gospels were not enough ; the No-su too must have the Word in their own speech, and Mr. Amundsen began a tentative version of St. Mark with the help of a No-su interpreter.

No wonder one reads that 'Nothing more remarkable has been recorded in the history of missions in China. Tribe after tribe is coming under the influence of the Gospel.' And this striking movement among the tribes had a stimulating influence among the Chinese.

In 1914, and for several years onward, work in these regions was carried on through risks and difficulties on account of political troubles, revolt, and the rovings of robber-bands, and, later, civil war and the brigandage of disbanded soldiers. The first 'Bible Sunday' at Sapu-

shan Inland Mission Station was held in May 1914. Offerings were sent in from the fourteen out-stations, and after an address on the work of the Bible Society the church resounded with 'Oh's!' of glad surprise as the amount subscribed—78,000 *cash* (£16)—was written up on a blackboard. On that Bible Sunday 170 people were baptized—134 Hwa Miao, 35 Lisu, and 1 Laka.

The year 1915 was perhaps the brightest, but it was one of the saddest, in the Christian story of the tribes. St. Matthew in Hwa Miao had been issued two years earlier; now the first two packages of The Acts arrived among the hills. 'We are all charmed with the appearance of the books,' wrote Mr. Pollard. 'In a year when the claims on the Society are so great you have time and a heart big enough to care for the tribesmen of the West China hills. . . . Is it not wonderful that the first books these people are getting are the books of Jesus? That makes me glad, and very thankful to you all, and to the Master who is at the back of your great Society—nay, in its very heart.'

This version of the New Testament had been, and was yet, an arduous though happy task. The rendering of a passage in St. Matthew had given him a bright glimpse into the Miao heart.

At the verse 'He called to Him a little child and set him in the midst of them,' his Miao assistant pressed him to insert the word *kissed*. 'But the word *kissed* is not there,' said Mr. Pollard. 'It must be there,' was the reply; 'Jesus must have kissed the little one; He couldn't have helped it.' If the Miao could have had his way, the verse would have read: 'He called to Him a little one, and when He had taken him in His arms and kissed him . . .'

One of the ordeals of life is to feel strength failing before one's work is done. Weighed down with weakness, Mr. Pollard prayed again and again that he might be spared to see the completion of his version. As the native teachers sat with him, they counted the lessening verses that still remained to be done. At last they exclaimed joyfully, 'Finished!' Finished! -and the word carries one back to Bede in his cell at Jarrow, dictating the last verse of St. John on Ascension Eve nearly twelve centuries ago.

So passed away, in December 1915, one of the great pioneers who 'baptized thousands of the tribesmen, built churches and schools, prayed for penitent wizards, nursed typhoid patients and lepers.' His grave is high on the

hillside overlooking the villages of his beloved Hwa Miao.

In this busy year twenty tribal colporteur-readers were abroad, and a dozen Chinese, one of whom, accompanied by his blind wife, brought from one of his journeys half-a-load of idols and spirit-tablets.

Some time before the Kopu had built themselves a chapel. It was a poor building of sun-dried brick, without window or floor. One of Mr. Amundsen's last journeys was to Shinsao, where ministers of both Missions were to open a new Kopu chapel. A few miles from the village he was met by crowds of children from six schools, bearing their school banners. The new chapel was a white, windowed building with room for two thousand worshippers. At the opening service it was filled, and a great crowd had to stand outside for lack of space.

Between the China Inland and the United Methodist Missions there were now among the tribes in Yunnan 8996 church members, 21,100 adherents, 137 chapels, and 49 schools.

The complete Hwa Miao New Testament and the Gospel of St. Mark in Lisu were put into the hands of the people in 1917. (At later dates were published St. Mark for the White Miao; St. Mark and St. John for the Lisu of

west Yunnan, and St. Luke for the No-su. Half of the MS. of The Acts in Nosu had been 'set up' by the printers in Japan when both type and manuscript were destroyed in the earthquake of 1923.)

The sale of Scriptures in 1904 was 17,071 copies. The total for the five years 1904-8 was 167,548. In the five years 1914-18 the number sold was 1,055,415. One simple incident, however, may give a clearer conception of the change which had taken place among these primitive people than any statistics.

In 1921 the Rev. W. H. Hudspeth of Stone-gateway, Chaotung, visited a dirty, damp, dilapidated mud-hut. There was no window, and it was some time before he could see his 'parishioner'—a sick man who had been unable to walk for three years. 'He was lying on goatskins spread upon the cold floor,' wrote the missionary. 'Close to him to keep him warm was a coal-fire, built up on the floor, without any fireplace or chimney. In spite of his pain, his poverty, and his helplessness, he looked wonderfully contented. I asked him to tell me why he was so happy. From under his pillow (a rough block of wood) he pulled out two soiled books (the Gospels of St. Mark and St. John). "Teacher," he whispered, "it is

these two books that make me contented. They have made me wonderfully happy," and while he spoke his very features were transformed. He could repeat both Gospels from beginning to end. As I looked into his happy face I felt that if the British and Foreign Bible Society could have seen this one man they would never regret the money they have generously expended on printing the Scriptures for the once illiterate Miao.'

Were there no other evidence, this episode of the primitive tribes would alone suffice to prove that 'to read these little Gospels is to touch the hem of His garment.'

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BIBLE IN ENGLAND

On his way to Rome, 'bound amidst ten leopards,' St. Ignatius penned his last greeting to the church in Magnesia. 'Hold fast,' he wrote, 'to your faith in the Nativity and in the Passion and in the Resurrection.' That threefold belief was the dayspring which lit up with a new meaning and an infinite hope the life of Western heathenism. The change which those three events wrought in the hearts and minds of our Anglo-Saxon forefathers is clearly visible in their very folk-lore and the old customs which are not yet forgotten.

The Yule-tide holly and ivy lost their old heathen associations, and were invested with the mystery and gladness of the Nativity. On that divine night all evil spirits were spell-bound and had no power to harm. Beautiful legends sprang up about the cattle which knelt in their byres, the bees which hummed in their hives, the cock which crew all night, shrilling the good tidings to distant thorps. Strange fancies

of unlettered tribes, we call them to-day, but beneath them there was a new and inspiring faith in the birth of the Redeemer. So, too, at Easter, when the winter fires were done with, and all traces of smoke and soot were cleared away, and the floors were strewn with green rushes and early flowers, these old customs served to remind men and women that the house of the soul should be swept and sweetened afresh. If they hastened out of doors at dawn to see the sun rise up dancing for joy, it was the joy of the Resurrection that was taking them early to the rude wattled church or the cross of wood where they met for worship.

This change in the traditions of the people was brought about by the Celtic and Roman missionaries, who travelled far over the moors and among the wooded hills of Northumbria, preaching the Gospel, and eventually baptizing believers in hundreds in the streams and rivers. One can scarcely doubt that in their journeys Aidan and Cuthbert, Paulinus and his deacon James, came upon places still inhabited by Christian Britons, who had been spared by the Anglian invaders, and these may have helped the missionaries to spread the faith.

Of the Passion of our Lord we shall speak later, when belief in the Divine Sacrifice had

begun to transform England into what may be called the Land of the Cross. Meanwhile, about the year 650, as the result of a strange dream, Cædmon, a herdsman of Whitby Abbey, was inspired to paraphrase the sacred Scriptures in his Anglian mother tongue. Doubtless he had often heard many parts of them translated from the Latin, and explained by the teachers in the Abbey, and now the royal Abbess Hilda took him into the cloister and appointed scholarly men to assist him with his theme. He sang to his people in their own speech the whole story of Genesis, the Deliverance of Israel out of Egypt and the Entrance into the Promised Land, the Incarnation of the Lord, His Passion, Resurrection and Ascension, Pentecost and the Teaching of the Apostles.

To-day nothing survives that can be regarded with certainty as his own work in the form in which he left it. This and that is ascribed to his 'school,' but in any case we have here the creation of a new poetry, and the first approach to an English reading of the Bible.

Some twenty years after the death of Cædmon (*circa* A.D. 680) actual translation began. The Psalms were rendered into East Anglian by St. Guthlac on his little island in the Fens, now the site of the ruins of Crowland Abbey, and into

West Saxon by Ealdhelm, Abbot of Malmesbury and Bishop of Sherborne, long remembered for the songs he sang, standing on the bridge like a gleeman, till the crowd was large enough for him to preach to. No trace of these versions remains, nor yet of the Psalter and the New Testament which some have thought that Bede completed.

One Anglo-Saxon rendering of the Psalter is of special interest. The Manuscript was one of the Latin books which Pope Gregory the Great sent over to Augustine in the year 601. In the ninth century an English rendering was inscribed between the Latin lines. Of still greater interest is 'The Book of Cuthbert the Blessed'—the 'Book of Durham' or 'Lindisfarne Gospels,'—a priceless illuminated folio which, after strange adventures, is now in the keeping of the British Museum. The original Latin text in it was begun in the lifetime of St. Cuthbert by Eadfrith, who in 698 became one of the Saint's successors in the See of Lindisfarne, and the cover was wrought in silver inlaid with gold and precious stones by Bilfrith the goldsmith-hermit. In 875 Halfdan the Viking descended on the coast of Northumbria; the monks of Lindisfarne fled with all their belongings—the most prized among them the body of the Saint and his book of the Gospels;

and the country folk fled with them. About 950, when after long wanderings the Saint lay at rest in the wooden church at Chester-le-Street, the Latin text of the book was interlined word for word with a Northumbrian translation by Aldred the priest.

In the stormy years of the Danish invasion at the close of the tenth century, a nameless scribe produced in the peace of the cloister what may be termed the first 'people's edition' of an Anglo-Saxon version. It contained no Latin text, and the numerous copies which survive seem to indicate a widespread use of it. Whether the scribe was himself the translator, or what existing translations he edited, is unknown, but a singular pathos attaches to the Fourth Gospel if, as has been suggested, it is no other than the translation of which the venerable Bede dictated the closing verse just before he died, on the eve of Ascension Day, 742.[1]

Such was the inception of that great work which, elaborated through centuries and consecrated by the blood of martyrs, is to-day our English Bible.

We turn back to the eighth century. Seventy

[1] The date usually given is 735, but Mayor and Lumby's researches (*Bedae Hist. Eccl.* III. iv.) make 742 more likely to be correct.

years after the death of Cædmon, and eight after that of Bede, the voice of a new singer was sounding through Northumbria. Cynewulf was the author of many poems, but among the most memorable are *The Christ*, *Elene* (the Empress Helena, who is said to have discovered the True Cross), and *The Dream of the Rood*. In this last poem the Dream Rood is still the glorified Cross of the Early Church—golden, wreathed with light, inlaid with jewels at the foot and along the reach of the arms; and yet, as the poet lies before it thinking of his sinfulness, he sees that at one moment this 'Tree of the Healer' is shining with gems, and at the next that it is wet with a flush of blood.

It was about this time that the skilled workers in stone, first brought over to Wearmouth and Jarrow by St. Benedict Biscop, began to carve that series of tall stone crosses the like of which had hitherto been unknown either at home or abroad. These, too, were 'Trees of Glory.' The scrolls of vine branches and other foliage on the shafts of many of them recalled, as one watched the birds and furry creatures among the berries and grape clusters, the happy imagery of the Catacombs. When the figure of the Redeemer was represented, it was not that of our Lord in agony, and in the early

years it was completely clothed, like the figure in that rare relic of the past, the crucifix built into the outer wall of Langford Church in the south-west corner of Oxfordshire. The most celebrated of the series is the Ruthwell Cross, on which are carved in runes verses, half-remembered or condensed through lack of space, from *The Dream of the Rood*. Sculpture and Art had joined hands to the glory of the Risen Christ.

As generation followed generation the Cross in stone or wood came to be almost a characteristic of English landscape. The traveller met with it everywhere—in the market-square, in the churchyard, at the cross-roads, by the wayside well, on the lonely moor, amid the standing corn of some old battlefield. It marked the parish boundary and the limits of monastic and of manorial lands. Many of these Crosses were invested with the rights of sanctuary, and could any privilege have been more in keeping with the Cross of Calvary than the right to be a refuge to the robber and the fugitive?

Such names as High Cross, Crouch End, Crosthwaite, Crosshill, Cross Slack (the Cross of the Valley), Crossford, Crutchley (Meadow of the Cross), Crossmichael, Crosby (Abode by

the Cross), Croughton (Cross-town), Crewkerne (Place of the Cross), and Rothwell (the Well of the Rood) fix the locality of some few of the thousands of Crosses which once betokened the Christianity of England.

These glimpses of the early Anglo-Saxon days are familiar enough, but it is not often that they serve to remind us of the fact that it is the Bible to which we owe the beginnings of English civilisation, of English art, and of English literature. As to the Bible itself, notwithstanding the prevalence of Norman French in high and public life, the people preserved their mother tongue in its various dialects, and the *Ormulum* in the East Midland speech (*c.* 1200), and Wycliffe's *Gospels*, in East Midland tinged with his native Yorkshire, connect our Bible of to-day with the first English paraphrases and translations.

Our indebtedness to the Word of God is beyond question; but do we always realise that whatever is best in our national character and in our history is clearly traceable to it? It gave us our freedom of conscience; it set up for us higher standards of right, justice, honour. Such progress as we have made in the humanising of our laws, in the relief of the poor, in the protection of children, in the care

of the sick, in the improvement of prisons, in changing the very spirit of imprisonment from punishment to reformation, in the civil and political emancipation of creeds, in the supervision of industry, and in the humane treatment of animals, is due to its uplifting and illuminative influence.

CHAPTER XXV

'THE RETURN-FEAST'

THE first consignments of the Bible Society's great edition of the Maori New Testament (20,000 copies) reached New Zealand in January 1842, and invitations to a Feast of the Great Treasure were at once sent out from the mission stations to the people of the surrounding villages. Hundreds arrived, and 'every face beamed with delight' at the sight of the Great Treasure (*Taonga Nui*) piled on the mission tables. Now one of the old customs of this splendid island race was to respond with 'love for love' and 'gift for gift,' and two or three weeks after the distribution of the books there was an unusual stir among the Maoris. They came streaming in from all sides, bearing baskets of potatoes and Indian corn by way of a 'return-feast' (*paremata*). The baskets were ranged in the courtyard of the mission, and a chief, passing along the rows and touching them at intervals with a long wand, begged that they should be accepted in the name of

'the fathers at home.' 'This is all we can do,' he said, 'to show our love to those who have plentifully supplied us with food for our souls.' Within three years £431 was transmitted from New Zealand for this New Testament.

For nearly a century and a quarter the sole purpose and aspiration of the Bible Society has been to provide, as a national 'feast of thanksgiving' for the English Bible, that every man shall possess in his own tongue that Book which is the one unfailing light of mankind. That purpose has been readily and generously maintained by members of all denominations at home and abroad, and the Society has no misgiving that England will ever forget what she owes to the Word of God.

In 1910, on the same day and almost at the same hour that the World Missionary Conference was opened in Edinburgh, the Hon. Sir Narayan Chandavarkar, a Hindu Judge of the High Court, was speaking in Bombay on 'The Kingdom of Christ and the Spirit of the Age.' 'Let me tell you,' he said in the course of his address :

'Let me tell you what I consider the greatest miracle of the present day. It is this,—that to this great country with its three hundred million

of people there should come from a little island, unknown even by name to our forefathers, many thousands of miles distant from our shores, and with a population of but fifty to sixty millions, a message so full of spiritual life and strength as the Gospel of Christ. This surely is a miracle, if ever there was one.

'And this message has not only come, but it is finding a response in our hearts. . . . The process of the conversion of India to Christ may not be going on as rapidly as you hope, or exactly in the manner that you hope . . . but the ideas that lie at the heart of the Gospel of Christ are slowly but surely permeating every part of Hindu society, and modifying every phase of Hindu thought. And this process must go on, so long as those who preach this Gospel seek above all things to commend it, not so much by what they say as by what they do and the way they live.'

This 'little island' is indeed but a small cradle, and when Sir Narayan Chandavarkar spoke, the Great War had not shown him the stalwart children who had been rocked in it trooping to their mother's side in hundreds, in thousands, in tens of thousands, yes, and coming in twos and threes, and even in eager units, from the ends of the earth. But to-day, if we

may trust the statement of a high U.S. official, the British Empire 'comprises one-fifth of the land surface of the globe, is the most populous dominion known to mankind, and also the wealthiest.' The English language, spoken by something over twenty and a half millions of people when the Bible Society was founded, is spoken to-day, we are told, by a hundred and seventy millions—about ten millions more than German, Spanish, and French put together. If these figures have any spiritual significance, surely they are a plea for an enthusiastic extension of the Society's work, of a special *paremata*, both in this 'little island' and in the vast England overseas.

Never in living memory was the Word of God more urgently needed to counteract the evils inflicted on the world by frantic ambition, ruthless savagery, and an attempt to trample the very thought of God out of His world. We have entered on an era of menace and change, but 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and for ever.' The intellect, the heart, the soul of man have discovered or devised nothing so uplifting in its purity, its beauty, its compassion, its revelation of the Unseen, as the truths of the New Testament. The religion which they teach underlies all that

is best in human nature. In mundane affairs it constitutes the strongest bond of Imperial unity, it underlies true patriotism and loyalty. It ensures liberty and justice, the vindication of right, the defence of the weak, the care of the poor ; and in homes in which faith has been shaken by suffering and bereavement it holds forth, not the illusions and surmises of psychic experiments, but the evidence of those forty days in which ' He shewed Himself alive after His passion.'

Undertakings many and large lie before the Bible Society. Ground lost in countries embroiled in the War has to be recovered. The vast expanses of Russia and Siberia have to be re-afforested with that ' Tree of light on whose arms the weight of this world's ransom hung.' The Scriptures are being prepared in the mother tongues of more and still more aborigines—among them the Aranda, one of the tribes of the wood-and-stone age, on the sandy plains and sandy mountains which to-day make Central Australia a desert, and to-morrow, after a downpour of rain, may break into leagues of foliage and blossom.

There are rumours, too, of new fields : in the Arctic, where Dr. Knud Rasmussen has come upon Eskimo tribes who had never before seen

a white man ; in the forests of Honduras where remnants still survive of the old Maya people ; amid the swamps and jungles of the Amazon valleys, inhabited by a yet older race.

Nearer home there are welcome signs of better days at hand. 'In Italy the Fascisti have consistently protected the Society's colporteurs. The Bulgarian Government now permits the Scriptures to enter free of all duty. The Spanish Directory intervened on two occasions at least to protect colporteurs from petty local persecution.' Most hopeful sign of all, 'The Greek Government has removed the ban on the importation and sale of the Modern Greek version.' Unpacked at Athens after being detained for close upon two years in the Custom House, the books were sold at the rate of five hundred in four days. 'Glory to God!' exclaimed a Greek priest, as he watched the people buying and in many cases covering the Bible with kisses.

All these memories are gathered up in the new Hundred and Forty-eighth Psalm which the Easter bells ring round the world.

ADDENDUM

God's Book lies very close to the hearts of faithful Christians. It is in the Bible, and in the Bible alone, that we have the record of His redeeming love. Here, as nowhere else, we find God drawing near to men and declaring in Christ His will for our salvation. In these pages we come face to face with Him who is the Restorer of the lost, the Absolver of the guilty, the Resurrection and the Life of the dead. His voice is as the sound of many waters. As we hear that message, full of the echoes of eternity, His Spirit bears witness within, and makes us certain that the testimony is true. We know that none other than God Himself is able to speak such words to our souls.

Many of us can hardly recall the time when we first began to read and reverence the Bible. It is hallowed by our earliest and tenderest memories. Dear, vanished hands opened the Book and pointed to the place where we learned to spell out in childish accents, *The Lord is my Shepherd*. When we had to leave home, the Book went with us where we wandered. Even

though we grew careless and perverse and wilful, it remained our monitor and judge. And when storms gathered and the rain descended and the floods came, we knew that here we had a Rock and a Refuge. To us the Bible is consecrated by all the deepest experiences of life. Its chapters have been our daily bread and strength and healing. No other book but this has brought us peace when we sat in the house of mourning, or shown us light to brighten the mystery of the grave. It is only through the comfort of the Scriptures that we have hope—either for this world or for the next.

What the Bible has proved itself to us personally, illustrates its incalculable value to our country. Who can imagine what England would be like—in its homes, in its laws, in its literature—apart from the influence of that Book which has infused itself, however imperfectly, into the national character, and is the corner-stone of the national faith. For Englishmen, at any rate, whether here or in distant colonies, Christianity is the religion of the Bible.

The Bible is the book for to-day. It deals with those elemental things which, like mother's milk and sunshine, can never be out of date. Other books grow stale and musty, and go to

their own place in the catalogue of things past. But the Bible carries on its leaves the dew of the morning. Other books, even the greatest, exhaust their message. But to-day, at the end of many centuries, this Book circulates more widely and influences mankind more profoundly than ever. Its mighty warnings and promises are perpetually fulfilled in human experience. The final proof and evidence of the Bible are that it is always coming true.

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More than a hundred years ago Englishmen were challenged by an appeal with this title : *The Excellency of the Scriptures : an Argument for their more general Diffusion* ; and the outcome of the appeal was to found the British and Foreign Bible Society, the greatest agency for spreading abroad the Bible which the Christian Church has ever known. The argument remains as valid as ever, and the duty as imperious. We who are so rich, so increased in spiritual blessings by our possession of God's message, dare we forget the needs and deny the claims of those destitute, sorrowful multitudes who sit at our gate and hold out their hands dumbly for the Gospel which can do for them all that it has done for us ?

What is your own Bible worth to you ? How

much difference has it made to you? How much do you owe as a debt of gratitude for the Book of God? Will you make the Bible Society the channel for paying part of the debt you owe?

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